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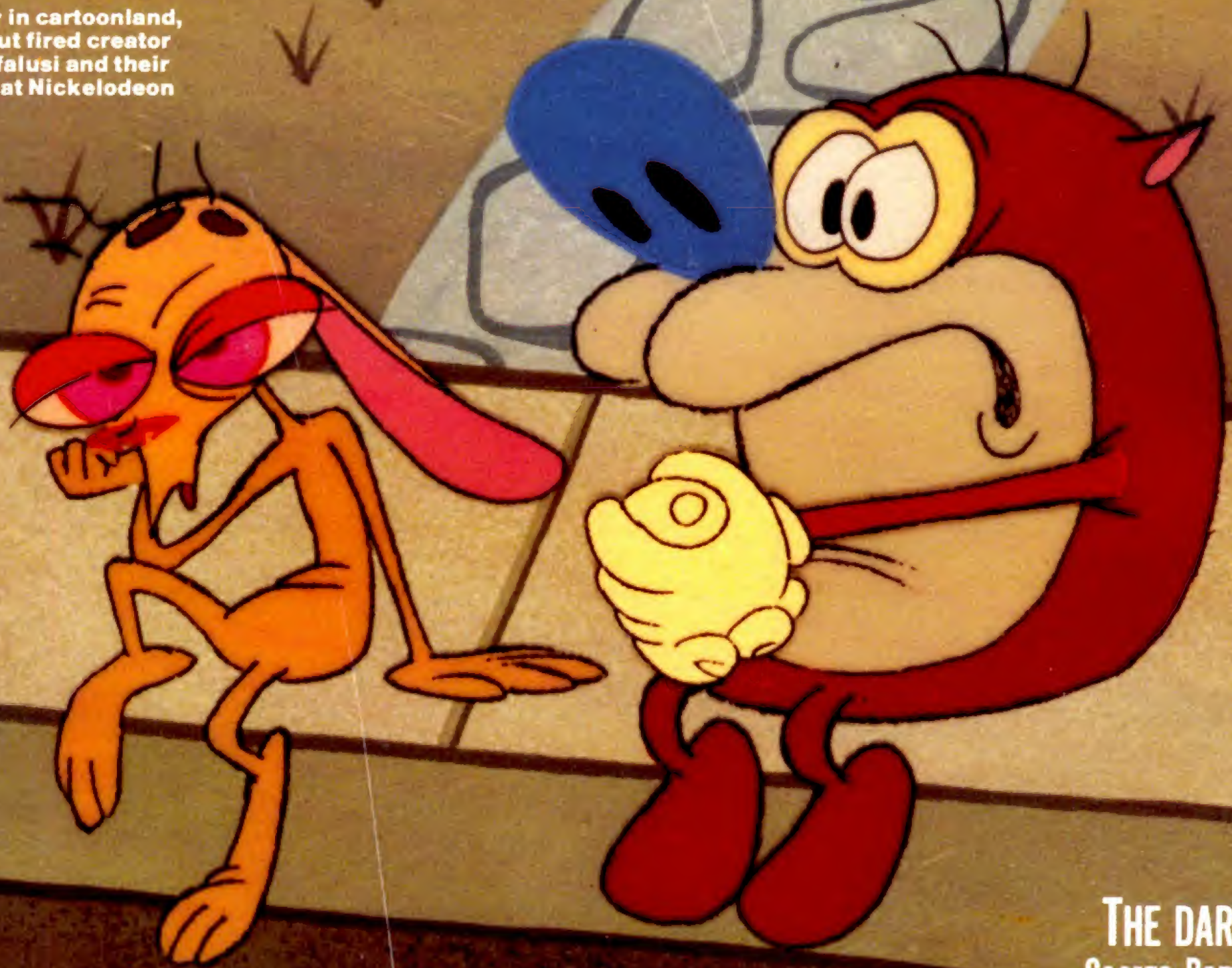
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June 1993

## Ren & Stimpy

NETWORK SUITS VS. CARTOON GENIUS

Moving day in cartoonland,  
worry about fired creator  
John Kricfalusi and their  
new home at Nickelodeon



THE DARK HALF  
George Romero films  
Stephen King's horror

Volume 24 Number 1



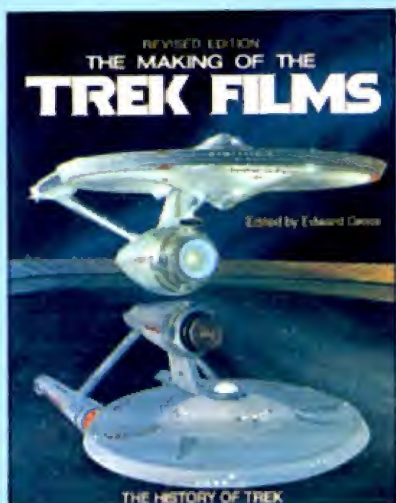
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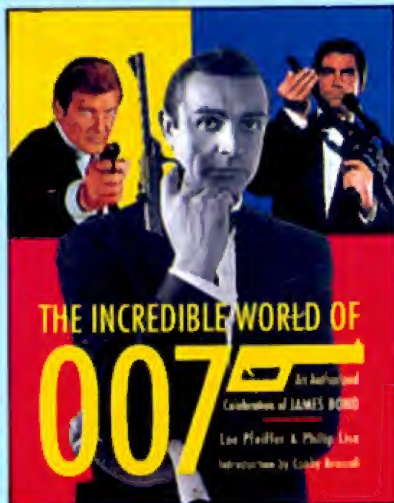
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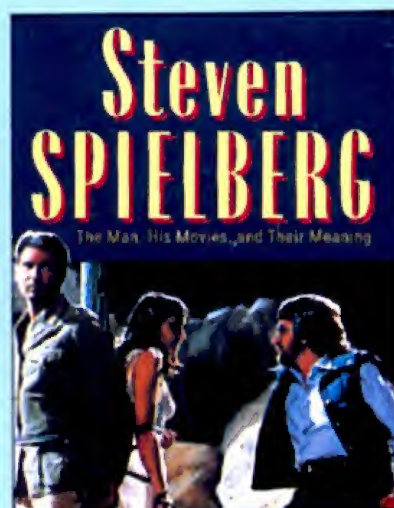
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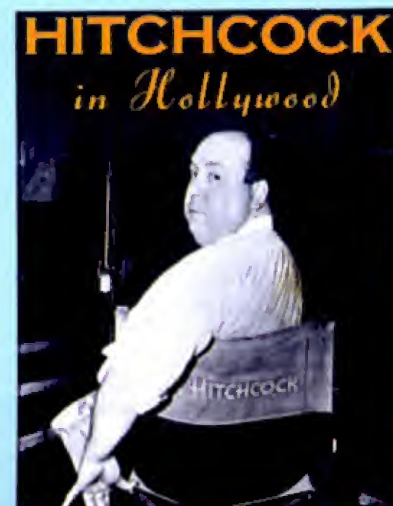
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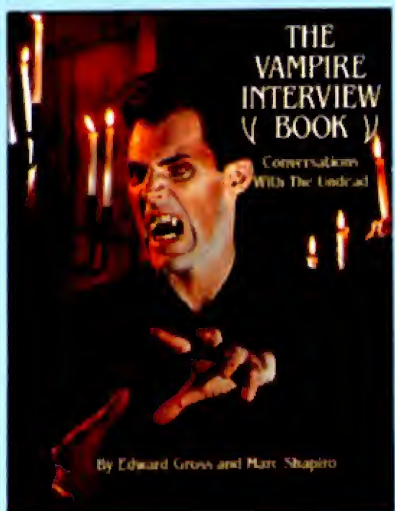
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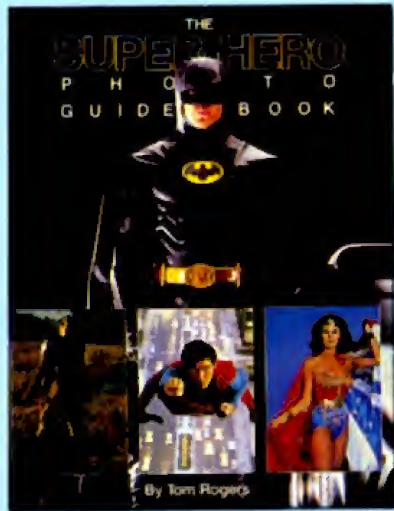
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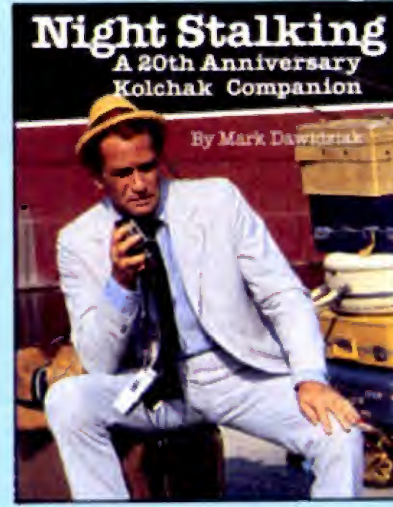
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The magazine with a "Sense of Wonder."

JUNE, 1993

What's with REN & STIMPY? If you're not a fan of the show, you've probably heard about it. It appeals to kids and adults and has given the creatively barren world of kidvid animation a needed shakeup. New York correspondent Dan Persons, who wrote this issue's cover story, has followed the Nickelodeon show from its early Sunday morning beginnings (episodes now also air on Saturday nights on MTV, for the older crowd), and encouraged me to watch it. I slept in.

But one Sunday morning I descended the stairs of our house just as the show was starting, and got corralled in front of the TV set, with wife Celeste, by daughters Whitney, 8 and Caitlin, 5, already camped out in front of the TV. "Dad, you've got to see this! It's REN & STIMPY!" As luck would have it, airing was one of the show's masterworks, "Stimp's Invention," a riff on the mad scientist genre and a hallmark of the series' bent, melodramatic humor. It was one of those great, communal moments: I was wowed and my girls beamed, having introduced me to one of the finer things in life. But REN & STIMPY isn't for everyone. Mom—a clinical social worker by trade—seemed to be grappling with a response to the episode's intense outburst of raw emotion. She arched an eyebrow and shrugged noting defensively, "Boy, cartoons sure have changed since I was a kid."

Needless to say, we put Persons right to work on the cover story you now hold, our first ever on cartoon animation. But an interesting thing happened along the way. John Kricfalusi (pronounced Chris-fah-loo-see), the show's creator and guiding light, got fired by Nickelodeon, who took away production responsibilities from Kricfalusi's Hollywood-based Spumco animators. Persons goes behind-the-scenes to chronicle the events that derailed the show, and provides an episode guide for those inspired to seek out Kricfalusi's cable cartoon gems. The question now among the show's legion of fans: can Nick do the show without the genius who inspired it?

Frederick S. Clarke



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# BODY SNATCHERS

## Abel Ferrara puts his own spin on the Jack Finney classic.

By Keith Holder

Bristling at hearing the *New York Times*' description of him as a director who works in B-movie territory with A-movie style, Abel Ferrara fired back, "I don't put letters on movies, you know what I'm saying? These guys don't know what a B-movie is, anyway." Ferrara was holding court on the set of *BODY SNATCHERS*, his take on the classic science fiction novel by Jack Finney, filmed twice previously. Warner Bros opens Ferrara's version nationwide in April.

On the set in Alabama, Ferrara made the somewhat bizarre assertion that Alfred Hitchcock "considered himself a B-movie director." Ferrara claimed that the revered British director "always bitched and moaned that he couldn't get the actors he wanted because he worked in the suspense genre." (In that Hitchcock worked with, among others, James Stewart, Cary Grant, Henry Fonda, Laurence Olivier, Gregory Peck, Ingrid Bergman, Grace Kelly, Montgomery Clift and Sean Connery, one wonders which actors Ferrara thought Hitchcock was denied.)

The director Ferrara singled out for special admiration was Italian filmmaker Pier Pasolini, the man who made such exercises in sado-masochism as *SALO, 120 DAYS OF SOD-*



The father of the heroine, turned pod, deflates when shot by his daughter, rubber likeness of actor Terry Kinney designed by Tom Burman.

*OM* and *THE CANTERBURY TALES*. Ferrara also claimed to admire Don Siegel, the director of 1956's *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*, but had difficulty naming a movie Siegel directed that he liked. Pressed, he laughed and said, "THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL"—a Robert Wise film.

Ferrara expressed little fondness for Siegel's version, owing to the fact that "Siegel got ripped off by the producers. They stuck [on] this bullshit opening, this bullshit ending, this bullshit voiceover, and they fucked up his music track." Ferrara, who tended to pepper his speech with "awesome," also expressed reservations about Siegel's Bette Mid-

ler film, *JINXED*. When informed that Siegel referred to Midler as "a most unpleasant young lady," Ferrara retorted, "Then why didn't he shoot her, like a real director should?"

"That's Abel," noted producer Robert Solo, who seems to be trying to turn Finney's novel into a franchise. Solo, who remade Siegel's film in 1978 with director Phil Kaufman, hired Ferrara to direct after Stuart Gordon (*RE-ANIMATOR*) bowed out. Ferrara's own filmography includes *THE DRILLER KILLER* and *MS 45* (definitely B-films) and the *BAD LIEUTENANT*, a distasteful film that has made him into something of

a critical darling. Ferrara brought with him longtime collaborators, writer Nicholas St. John (to rewrite and polish the script) and cinematographer Bojan Bazelli. Rounding out Team Ferrara was editor Anthony Redman.

If Ferrara is comforted by being surrounded by familiar faces, he didn't appear so on the set in Alabama. At a central intersection of Selma's abandoned Fort Daly, dubbed "Times Square" by the *BODY SNATCHERS* crew, a climactic scene of a dozen pod-laden army trucks and jeeps rumbled past at precisely the right speed to allow a carefully choreographed crossing of extras and principals. Backlit by intense Xenon lights, trees bereft of



Ferrara's version of Finney's 1955 novel differs markedly from the book.

leaves formed an eerie silhouette—an effect sought by director of photography Bazelli.

As the vehicles and cast moved into position, producer Solo leaned over and, between puffs on what he referred to as his "prototypical producer's cigar," whispered conspiratorially, "See that? One thing all three films have in common—trucks filled with pods trying to transport their cargo to the outside world."

Bundled in coats, a crew accustomed to the climate of California found the 55 degree Alabama night to be bitter cold. Not so the Bronx-born Ferrara. Clad in a black leather coat (open with a sheaf of rolled papers stuffed into a pocket) with a red Stihl cap atop his head (a leftover from *THE DRILLER KILLER*?) he shuffled over to the camera, positioned in the center of the street atop a Chapman crane.

None of the half-dozen takes pleased Ferrara. Even before the air cleared of noxious blue-

A different kind of bad lieutenant for Ferrara, directing the helicopter chase at a deserted base in Selma.



# THE NEW INVASION

*One-time director Stuart Gordon would have accented the horror for the '90s audience.*

*By Keith Holder*

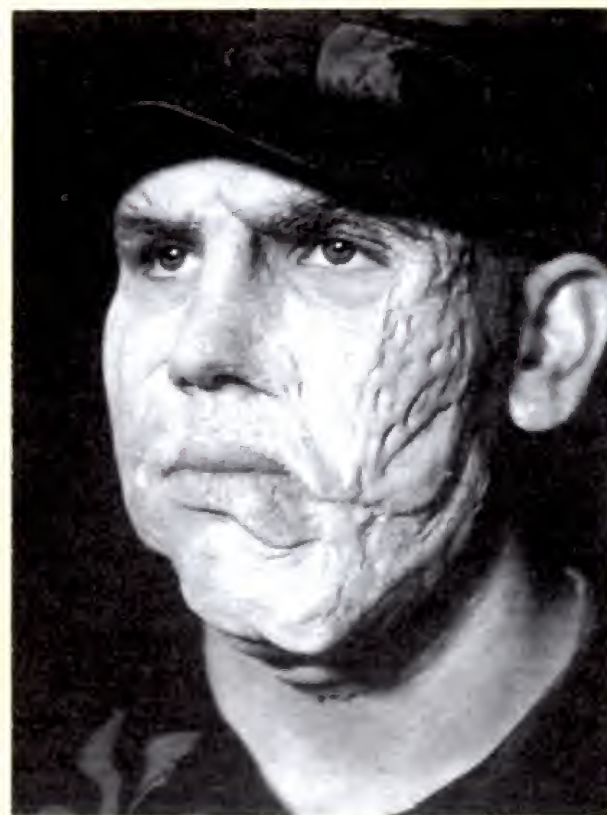
After producer Robert Solo had Larry Cohen (*IT'S ALIVE*) write a couple of drafts, Stuart Gordon (of *RE-ANIMATOR* fame) and his writing partner Dennis Paoli came aboard the Warner Bros project in December 1990. Gordon committed to direct *FORTRESS* in April after Warners sought to entice Stephen King to do a rewrite.

"Our feeling was that if you're going to have a new writer come on board, it should be someone really sensational," said Gordon. "Stephen King sent back this wonderful note saying, 'I was interested in doing the adaptation, but the script is fine the way it is. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.'"

King's praise prompted Gordon to prod Warner Bros to give *BODY SNATCHERS* a green light, but they insisted another writer be brought in to polish the script. Gordon worked with Nebin Shreiner until he left to direct *FORTRESS* in September 1991, but he would have preferred to direct *BODY SNATCHERS* had he been given the go ahead.

When informed that director Abel Ferrara's scripter, Nicholas St. John, toned down the graphic nature of Gordon's draft, Gordon responded, "It takes a lot more to scare people now that it did in the '50s when the first movie came out."

One Gordon concept not retained was the idea to provide the pod organisms with human exteriors, but insides of pure plant material, like Howard Hawks' *THE THING* (1950). "To me, that idea had a lot of potential," said Gordon. "Unlike a human being, whose



Burman's pod degeneration. In the original script would-be director Gordon wanted the pods to be invincibly *THING*-like vegetables.

brain is located in a specific part of the body, the consciousness of the creature is spread throughout so that if you were going to, say, slice off its head, it would still be able to think."

A sequence in Gordon's draft had pod people closing in on a family trapped in a garage. "The family was using gardening tools—spades, rakes, hedge clippers—to fight back," said Gordon. "Ultimately they discovered that weed killer was the only thing that could stop the pods. It dissolved them," said Gordon.

Gordon revealed that the memorable pod scream from Solo's 1978 version (created by Ben Burtt) will be reused in *BODY SNATCHERS*. "Sound has a huge effect on you psychologically," said Gordon. "The cry when they discover an intruder in their midst is wonderful."

Though Solo and Ferrara were said to have beefed up the action in the film, Gordon noted his version had a "sequence of them dropping defoliant on

the pod people at the end of the movie. The idea for a helicopter dog-fight at the climax came from Bob Solo, if I'm not mistaken."

Gordon noted that he and Paoli played with several endings. "We had one where they just fly off into the sunset, not knowing what they were going to find," said Gordon. "Another had them landing only to find that the people were pods as well." Gordon hinted that further sequels might be planned. "There's some talk about setting the next one in Washington, D.C."

Gordon likes both of the earlier film versions, but the 1956 Don Siegel film is his favorite. "It's a brilliant,

timeless movie that holds up just fine," said Gordon, who finds the 1978 Philip Kaufman version more "dated" despite it being the more contemporary of the two. The theme of all the versions, springing from the Jack Finney novel, is the same, i.e. conformity. "It was a strong force in the 1950s, but it's still very much with us," said Gordon. "One of the points we got into in the script is that the people who had the best chance of surviving against the pods were the rebels, people rejected by the system." □

Gordon, directing *FORTRESS*, the assignment that kept him from *BODY SNATCHERS*, opening wide in April.



In the new version, set on an army base, a pod grows as a soldier sleeps.

gray exhaust fumes, Ferrara stalked back to the black-and-white video monitor and exclaimed, "This is a disaster!" Flanked by key crew members crowded around the monitor, the increasingly agitated director thrust an index finger at the quadrant of the screen to indicate the area of the complex shot that had gone awry or, at least, failed to meet his expectations.

Prior to one take, Ferrara cautioned the pod-extras not to move about stiffly as they crossed the street. Aping the clumsy monster-gait immortalized by Boris Karloff, he shouted, "I don't want Frankenstein!" But after multiple takes, Ferrara stared into the monitor and grumbled, "They're moving like zombies."

Ferrara's gnawed-to-the-quick fingernails betray him as one who will never win prizes for a placid nature. One of the interminable delays endemic to a movie location prompted him to announce, "Welcome to HEAVEN'S GATE."

Ferrara noted the screenplay's emphasis on the definition of and loss of identity was what first attracted him to the project. "What makes you, you, and what makes me, me. And the horrible nightmare of still being alive, but you're spiritually dead. You're still there, but you're not there." Perhaps feeling he had waxed too philosophical, he added, "Also, I like that the fucking Martians show up on page one." □

# BOXING HELENA

By Patricia Ross

"The hardest thing is letting go of the fear that people are seeing you as somebody's daughter. Just some little movie brat who doesn't know what she's doing...no *business* there or talent. It's a general misconception, and I can't deny the validity of that being their first thought. 'A 24-year-old girl who wrote a script when she was 19, and she's David Lynch's daughter. Eeeooo!'" Jennifer Lynch grimaced, looking much like a pugnacious child. The small red-head is the writer and director of *BOXING HELENA*, and, considering the oeuvre of her father, film director David Lynch, it won't be surprising that the subject of her film is not pugilism.

Lynch has been described with banalities like "perky" and "fresh-faced." They conjure up pictures of a young, enthusiastic female who is somehow not quite professional in her demeanor. At the same time, Lynch has been repeatedly burdened with crippling responsibilities to "those that come behind her" and with what she owes the world as the youngest female director...*ever*.

Lynch has been living with *BOXING HELENA* for five years. "When I was 19, I met with [producer] Phillippe Caland, who was looking for a female writer to develop a story about a man obsessed with a woman. He removes her arms and legs and keeps her in a box. I felt it had to be a love story. *They asked me* to direct it. It had never occurred to me to direct." Lynch cast Julian Sands as Nick and Sherilyn Fenn as Helena, the ill-fated lovers.

Lynch admitted to having di-

**The directing debut of Jennifer Lynch is a chip off the old block.**



Sherilyn Fenn as Helena. In Lynch style it's not the story of a female *ROCKY*. David blew up Fenn on *TWIN PEAKS*. Now his writer-director daughter chops off her limbs.

rected in theory, if not practice, for many years. "I had grown up on my father's sets," said Lynch. "Most of the time I spent with him was on the set while he worked. I feel very comfortable there. When I was 16 or 17, it started to occur to me, when I watched him work, 'Well, that's interesting, but I would have done it this way.' And that's what clicked when they offered me the director's position."

With the invitation to direct, there was relief as well. "I was excited about it and concerned that whoever did it would have to walk a fine line," she explained. "It can't be a horror film, and it

can't be about condoning the act that takes place. I felt this way I could be in control of how this material is handed to the world. It's more of an invitation to try something magical and different, rather than what it could have been: a very horrifying, degrading picture to women."

Lynch had a clear concept of Julian Sands' Nick. "It's about a man who, other than for his special skills as a surgeon, is still very much the child he was when he was five. He was never embraced by his parents, figuratively or physically. And just as a child when it sees a puppy is in awe of it and wants to pet it,

when it wants to walk away, he presses it to the ground; not to hurt it, just wanting it to stay. That's Nick's process with Helena. 'Please just stay.' It's out of that naivete that we understand what he's doing. Helena is never victimized. He's always the one victimized by her."

Although Lynch saw Sherilyn Fenn on her father's *TWIN PEAKS* sets for years, she was barely acquainted with her. "I actually didn't get to know her when she was working with my father. She thought I hated her and I thought she hated me, so we never spoke. I've certainly developed a friendship. I think we were both on guard a little bit about how close we were gonna get."

Lynch learned of Fenn's interest in appearing as Helena when both Madonna and Kim Basinger backed out of their respective contracts. "I've always had a lot of respect for her talent," said Lynch. "I hadn't called on her in the first place because I thought she was too young. Although she's 27, with that angelic face she tends to look younger. I went through some of the script with her. That's when I realized that there's tremendous strength and maturity within her that comes out. It's ageless. Putting a woman in a box alone is a frightening thing, because you want the world to see it as you mean to see it...not as this horrifying image. And putting a young, sweet girl like Sherilyn in a box is like putting Bambi in a box. You *don't* want to do it. But I felt secure with it and she was a tremendous asset to the picture. She's a great talent."

Lynch feels an obligation to fulfill her own weighty expectations, rather than those of her fa-



Fenn and Julian Sands in Jennifer Lynch's offbeat story of star-crossed lovers.

amous father's devotees. "My father asked me if I needed any help with this and I said, 'No, just stay away.' He didn't take it in the wrong way. He said he understood that it was hard enough, me being a young female. He said, 'You don't need people to think I had something to do with it.'"

Still, the director is philosophical and good humored about the inevitable comparison between father and daughter Lynch. "I know that people are going to say that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree," she said. "If anything, it's the very sort of true difference between men and women. Women are more interested in and more accessible to the emotional textures of things rather than the gigantic picture. My father deals with some very emotional stuff, but through imagery."

The *BOXING HELENA* script penned by his daughter reportedly terrified the renowned maker of *BLUE VELVET* and

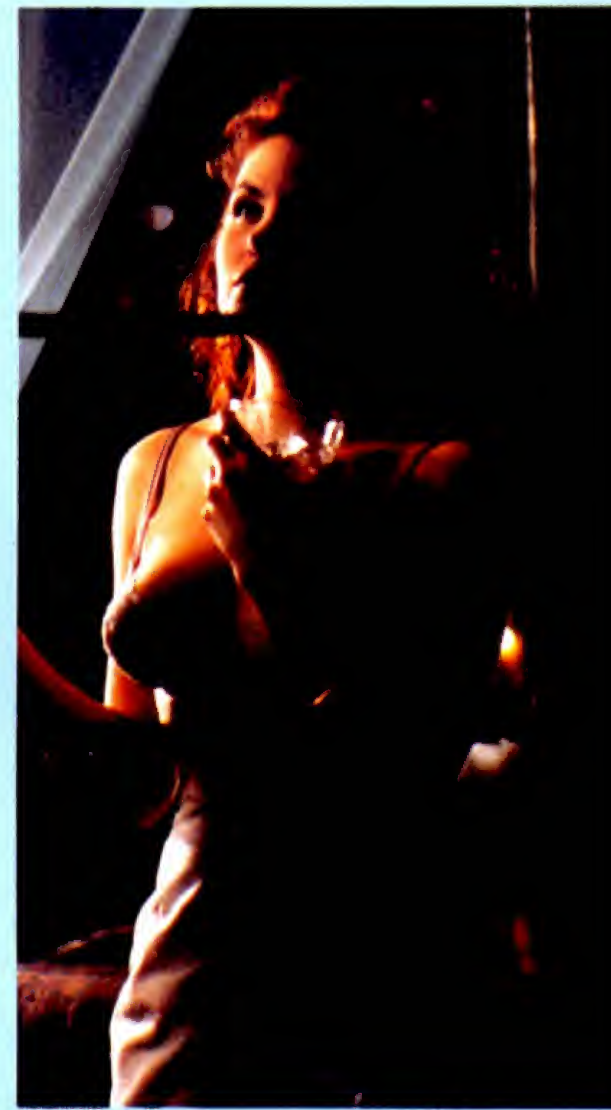
*WILD AT HEART*. Lynch chuckled as she related his reaction. "He said, 'Ohmygod, I could never make this movie. It's way too emotional and weird.' I thought, 'Uh oh. Oh, no! Way too emotional and weird for you?' I think that's because it goes straight to the essence of having a dream. Things disappear and reappear as needed by the dreamer. And when Helena's legs and arms become the tools

by which she leaves Nick, they have to go. There's no blood or gore."

Lynch noted it was a struggle as a young woman to get attention and backing for *BOXING HELENA*. "I had to kick open doors in Hollywood," she said. "I dyed my hair red [Lynch is a natural blonde] and put on 55 pounds. I took all of my sexuality away, every ounce of who I was normally. Then all they could look at was me. I had something to say! I didn't get any help from my father. I didn't get help from anyone outside except from those that believed in the project. I know what struggle is about. When I used to walk into a studio meeting, people would think, 'Here comes this blond bimbo with a scary script that nobody wants to touch, and she's David Lynch's daughter. She's not going to sleep with me so what do I want with her?' It's a common problem." Lynch, on set, has obviously taken off the weight. "It's no longer necessary for me to hide that I'm a female," she said.

Lynch hoped audiences would find her film thought-provoking, but admitted that some will find it shocking. "We all pay seven dollars to walk into a movie theatre and watch other people live their lives. We're all Peeping Toms at heart. Some people, regardless of my attempts to make it *not* a horror film, are going to find it horrifying."

Lynch's concept for the film was to make it Nick's vision, his dream of Helena. Despite telling a man's story, Lynch feels she's given the film a feminine sensibility. "I think if a man had directed it, it would have changed the image of who she is and what



Fenn, the overwhelming obsession of surgeon Sands, a role Kim Basinger agreed to but backed out of playing.

she becomes," said Lynch. "I really saw him as putting her on a pedestal and enthroneing her in this box, rather than stuffing her there. He takes a woman who he considers a diety and brings her down to the level where he can deal with her, which is that of a patient, while still enthroneing her as a thing of beauty that he loves."

Lynch encouraged the hiring of more women than is usual for the crew, an even split of men to women. "I think it's made a tremendous difference," said Lynch. "It helped keep damaging remarks to a minimum. The gender balance seemed to make a difference."

Lynch noted that she is often asked whether real paraplegics will take offense at the film. She hoped not, and summed up her feelings this way, "We're glorifying what is within, not making a mockery of it. Helena is beautiful regardless. It's very important to me that she not be a victim. I want people to know that this is not about laughing at people. Regardless of what you have, or don't have, we're all here together on the same planet. None of us is less or more beautiful than the other. Let's look at things we normally wouldn't look at and call them beautiful...because they are." □

Lynch directs Sands and Art Garfunkle in a cameo as the surgeon's colleague.



# SUPER MARIO BROS

**An effects head trip from the gurus behind Max Headroom.**

*By William Wilson Goodson Jr.*

Mario originated in Nintendo's 1980 arcade video game called Donkey Kong. Three sequels followed, Super Mario Bros: II, III, and Dr. Mario, as well as two cartoon shows—SATURDAY SUPERCADDE and THE SUPER MARIO SUPER SHOW. Now superstardom beckons as Mario appears in his first feature film, SUPER MARIO BROS, played by Brit Bob Hoskins. Walt Disney opens the big-budget, live-action fantasy nationwide May 28.

Orchestrated by producer Roland Joffe and his Lightmotive Fat Man company, the film was shot last year in a deserted cement factory in Wilmington, North Carolina, directed by the MAX HEADROOM team of Annabel Jankel and Rocky Morton and designed by David L. Snyder with his usual BLADE RUNNER flourish.

Joffe raised the estimated \$35 million budget from outside investors, after purchasing the rights to the characters from Nintendo. Joffe noted, "Every element in it is based on the game. Our deal with Nintendo is that we will treat the characters well, but they have no input on the story or storyline."



Dennis Hopper as dinosaur descendant King Koopa, brandishing a Goomba flame gun, reptilian hairstyling by Michelle Johnson.

SUPER MARIO BROS is a bit of a departure for Joffe, the director of films like THE MISSION and THE KILLING FIELDS. "The Super Mario games are really fascinating," said Joffe by way of explanation. "There is a combination of Brooklynian dramas and dinosaurs, mixed with Japanese legends, an off-kilter world view of what America is. It's unique." Joffe's film was written by Barry Morrow (RAIN

MAN) with revisions by Ed Solomon (BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE).

The two Mario brothers, Mario Mario (Bob Hoskins) and Luigi Mario (John Leguizamo) are half broke plumbers in Brooklyn. Luigi, the dreamy younger brother, is smitten by Daisy (Samantha Mathis of PUMP UP THE VOLUME) an archeologist excavating a subway fossil bed. When Daisy is abducted, the plumbers follow her kidnapers through a portal into Dinoyark—New York in an alternate universe in which man evolved from the dinosaurs. At the end of the film a pair of Japanese executives is seen to approach the brothers to purchase the video game rights to their adventure.

Joffe pegged the film's appeal to realizing a fantasy adventure with a high degree of verisimilitude. "The level of realism in the film is very, very high," he said. Joffe noted that the film's realism extended to its performances. "The key to the movie is to say that this is a believable story," he said. "The characters [also] have to be believable, even the ones that are really odd."

Hoskins was only familiar with the Nintendo games







**DINOYARK**  
**MAX HEADROOM**  
 directors Rocky Morton and wife Annabel Jankel conceived of an alternate universe New York, where man evolved from the dinosaurs. Built in a vacant concrete factory in North Carolina by designer David L. Snyder, the million-dollar set was christened "Dinohattan" by the cast & crew.



through his children Rosa and Jack. And their attempts to explain it to him, he noted, were useless. He took the role of Mario only after Joffe pursued him strenuously. "I didn't like the script at first and I really didn't want to do another kid's film," said Hoskins of his initial reticence. "I'd done ROGER RABBIT. I'd done HOOK. I didn't want to become like Dick Van Dyke. But he [Joffe] kept sending me scripts and they kept getting better. Eventually, I said, 'Yeh, alright, yeh, I'll do it.' It always comes down to the script really. I don't think you can make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

Hoskins is noted as an actor for his extensive preparation, but had little to go on to flesh out Mario's cartoon character. "Basically all I could really go for was the relationship between me and John [Leguizamo]," said Hoskins. "I think he came up with the same idea. If we work as a pair of brothers, then no matter what situation we are in, it will have as much reality as possible."

Hoskins is renowned for the number of odd jobs he worked at before becoming an actor, almost by accident. He trained as both a commercial artist and an accountant, was a merchant seaman, fruit picker and, after becoming an actor, spent a season working in a circus. And like Mario, his resume includes a brush with plumbing. "I wasn't very good," said Hos-



Samantha Mathis as Daisy, the Bros' damsel in distress, in the clutches of one of Koopa's reptilian Goombas.

kins. "The plumber was up the ladder, and I was his mate, holding a glow lamp. It was on one of those streets where amazing-looking women pass. Well, I started looking at the women, and the glow lamp went straight on the sole of his boots and made the nails in his boots red hot. That was the end of my career as a plumber."

Leguizamo (CASUALTIES OF WAR) was approached to star opposite Hoskins after the producers saw his award-winning one man show *Mambo Mouth*. "What I liked about the

The victorious Bros, John Leguizamo as Luigi (l) and Bob Hoskins as Mario (r). Left: Hoskins dodges a Dinoyark cab—New York's aggressive drivers to the max.



# SUPER MARIOS

## DINOSAUR CREATIONS

*Puppet effects peopled the streets of Dinohattan with a cast of reptilian characters.*

*By William Wilson Goodson, Jr.*

Among the creatures inhabiting Dinoyark are the towering Goombas, the lizard men henchmen of evil ruler King Koopa (Dennis Hopper), and Yoshi, a three-foot-tall dinosaur intended to be more on the cute side. SUPER MARIO BROS conceptual designer Patrick Tatopoulos (BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA) conceived the creatures and supervised their construction, working with various makeup effects experts in Hollywood.

Tatopoulos hired Mark Maitre (BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER) to sculpt

Yoshi. Maitre produced a simple model for the director's approval in January 1991 and then fashioned the 36-inch creature, a cross between a Tyranosaurus Rex and an iguana, sculpted in oil-based clay over a welded metal armature. Maitre added folds around the knees and elbows to provide the appearance of a young animal who has not yet grown into his skin. The proper scaly texture was created by pressing a carved stamp all over the clay.

Maitre hired Paul Barnes (BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA) to make molds of Yoshi out of Ultra Cal 30, a quick set plaster that dries in an hour. Barnes cast the figure in pieces,

Two of Koopa's Goomba henchmen, effects by North Hollywood's Makeup Effects Labs. Originally written as background thugs, the characters won bigger roles.



Samantha Mathis as Daisy with Yoshi, a baby Tyranosaurus Rex modeled on the Bros dinosaur pal in their video game Super Mario World, a \$500,000 puppet pet.

separating the arms, legs, torso and head and produced a skin of foam latex about an inch thick but as thin as 1/8 inch around the eyelids. The work for the most part was completed in Maitre's garage.

Maitre recommended David Nelson (ALIEN 3) as the cable puppeteer and mechanical effects designer needed to bring Yoshi to life. Running was deemed too expensive to realize. Nelson mechanized two figures for filming, one rigged to lock into various stationary poses, and another for walking scenes. The walking Yoshi was mounted on a boom arm and could turn 90 degrees and be filmed from any angle. Seventy cables produced ten distinct movements, including lips, arms and eyes, controlled by a team of nine operators hired and trained by Nelson. The team rehearsed to video playback prior to filming.

Nelson fitted Yoshi with two specialized tongues. One is a bladder which, when filled, sticks out two or three inches, making it appear as if Yoshi is licking his lips. Another, three feet long, which could be oper-

ated separate from the figure, was designed to grab things. Total cost, \$500,000.

To realize the Goombas, Tatopoulos hired North Hollywood's Makeup and Effects Laboratories (SLEEPWALKERS). So pleased were directors Rocky Morton and Annabel Jankel, that they came up with additional scenes for the characters. The bodies are worn by actors in giant boots and three-fingered gloves. Helmets allow the performers to turn the Goombas' heads while peering out through the cloth in the figures' shirts, receiving direction by radio headphones.

MEL fabricated four types of Goomba heads, mixed and matched with seven distinct costumes. One Goomba, Hark, was mechanized with eye and facial movements, worn by MEL partner John R. Fifer, and puppeteered by partner Allan A. Apone.

The SUPER MARIO BROS creatures may soon be available as dolls or puppets. Yoshi already has his own video game. Noted sculptor Maitre, "It has merchandising written all over it." □



“Every element in the film is based on the game,” said producer Roland Joffe. “Our deal with Nintendo is that we will treat the characters well, but they have no input in the storyline.”

script was the adventure and the action that was involved,” said Leguizamo. “Sort of a PRINCESS BRIDE meets BEETLEJUICE.” Leguizamo noted how he worked with Hoskins to develop a rapport as a performance base. “He [Hoskins] is a very likeable guy, fun to be with. We went out together, to get the brother relationship.”

**N**early all of the inhabitants of Dinoyark are rendered with straight makeup supervised by Jeff Goodwin, with bizarre hairstyles created by Michelle Johnson to give them a punk, reptilian flair. Lizard prosthetics are reserved mostly for background characters. Scenes with effects lizard tongues were planned to drive home the prehistoric ancestry of the characters.

In one planned shot, Richard Edson as Spike, one of Daisy’s kidnappers, catches a fly with his tongue. In his effects trailer, Goodwin displayed two tongues made for the scene. One, a small extension, fits on the tip of Edson’s tongue, to be animated fully as a visual effect. Another latex tongue prop is to perform the actual scooping up of a plastic fly. Another planned scene called for two lizard characters to kiss, their tongues locking in mid-air. This will be filmed in reverse, by pulling the two latex tongues apart.

Creature effects for the film include an early scene in Dinoyark of two mighty dinosaurs fighting. As the camera pulls back, we realize that the monsters are fighting over a banana peel. The “ratosauruses,” seen running around in many scenes, are puppets created by Makeup Effects Labs, controlled by two cable operators each. Displayed in the effects workshop near the set, each figure is rigged

with cables running out of different parts of the body so various puppets can be shot from different angles. Two immobile full figures have head and body movements triggered by remote radio controls like those used for toy cars and boats. The rats are clearly fun to spar with, and I’m told the puppeteers, who turned them into their own form of arcade game, had to be ordered out of their bare concrete factory workshop late at night after filming had wrapped.

At the climax of SUPER MARIO BROS, King Koopa, the Mario Brothers’ nemesis, played by Dennis Hopper, slowly devolves into what conceptual designer Patrick Tato-



Koopa (Dennis Hopper) gets grief from Hark, the most fully articulated of the Goombas, de-evolved by Koopa from a rebellious street musician named Toad.

poulos (BRAM STOKER’S DRACULA) termed “an abstract, fantasy T-Rex.” Computer morphing supervised by Chris Woods transforms Hopper, with the aid of makeup, into the mechanized puppet monster. Rob Burman (CAT PEOPLE) and Tatopoulos sculpted four stages in the transformation, mechanized by Bud McGrew, who worked on the live

arena shows for the “Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.” McGrew actually got the job by bringing one of his remote-controlled heads to an interview with the directors.

Originally, Greg Beeman (MOM AND DAD SAVE THE WORLD) was set to direct SUPER MARIO BROS. Visual effects supervisor Woods, who was originally

## MOJO’S TOAD TALKS

Mojo Nixon, known as the court jester of punk, the Moj and the Chuck Yeager of free spirits, has gone Hollywood. Sporting a striking new hairdo on the set of SUPER MARIO BROS in Wilmington, N.C., Nixon plays Toad, a humanoid descendant of the dinosaurs. The irreverent son of the white owner of an all black gospel station, Nixon is the creator of such celebrity-jabbing songs as “Debbie Gibson is Pregnant with My Two-Headed Love Child.”

“Toad is a crazed musician, playing the streets of Dinoyark,” said Nixon. “He is kind of innocent and street wise at the same time, with a ‘Bob Dylan in his second album’ glazed look on his face—, so he is out there singing protest songs.”

Nixon sings bits and pieces of three songs, which



Punk singer Mojo Nixon, coiffed as Toad.

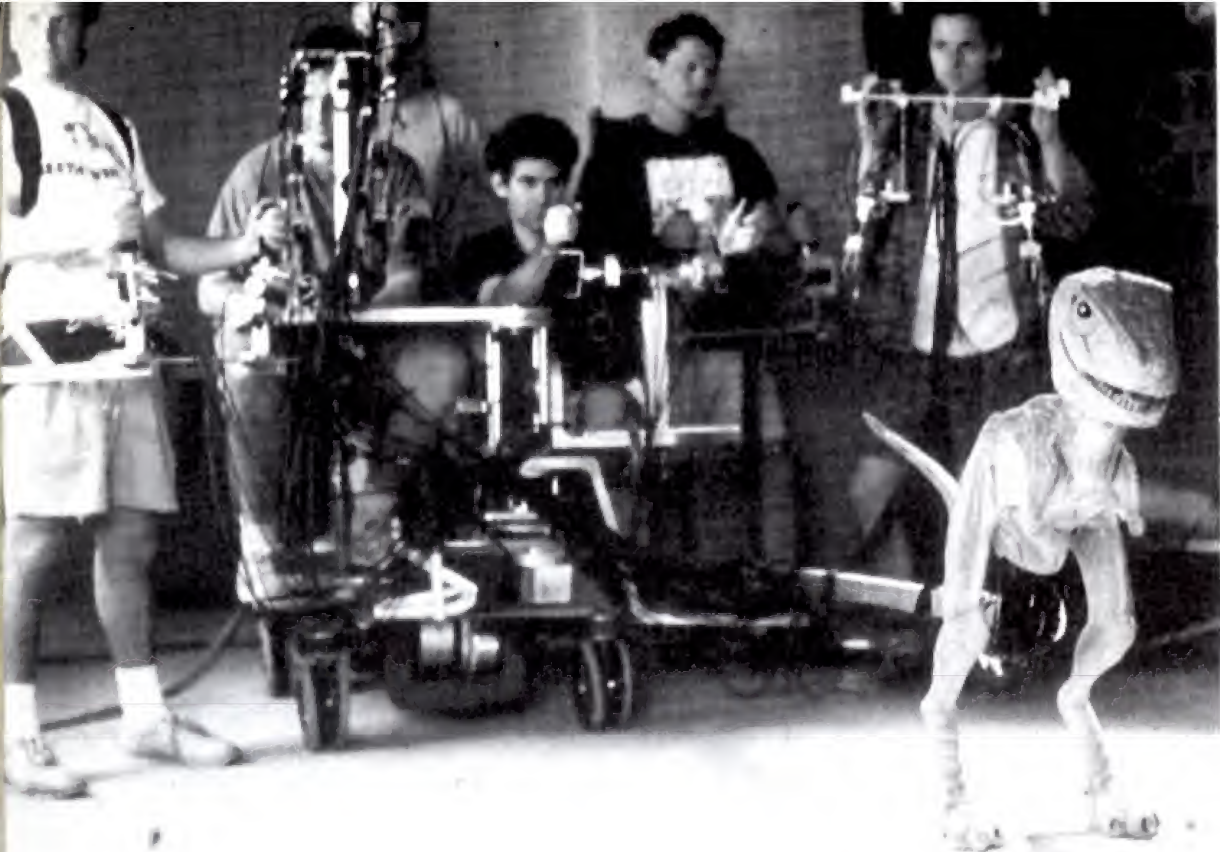
he didn’t write, but fiddled with. “If enough lawyers can get together and wrestle, I will probably get a song in the soundtrack,” he said. “I am not a real actor. This character I’ve created, Mojo Nixon, is not all that different from my real self, and Toad is just another step from there. If I ever become any kind of serious actor, I will

be a character actor, playing malcontents and roustabouts. No one is going to pay to see me fall in love or cry.”

Nixon seemed to relish Toad’s spiraled, reptilian hairdo. “My son, he’s nine, has determined he’s got to have it,” said Nixon. Originally, he was asked to shave his head for the part. Recalled Nixon, “My manager, Bullethead, didn’t even call me. He just said, ‘Sure, for 2000 more dol-

lars.’ We were broke. We needed the money.”

Nixon termed SUPER MARIO BROS “a cross between PEE-WEE’S ADVENTURE and ROBOCOP 2.” It’s his second film, after a brief appearance in GREAT BALLS OF FIRE. His own film project, CITIZEN MOJO, is tied up in the collapse of Enigma Records. □



Yoshi walks: connected to a pole arm rigged to a dolly truck, Daisy's Dinohattan pet struts its stuff thanks to a cadre of cable puppeteers headed by David Nelson.

hired by Beeman in July 1991, noted how Beeman's film would have been completely different. "We did a whole set of concept work that was nothing like we have now," said Woods. According to conceptual designer Tatopoulos, who also worked with Beeman, the original concept called for an alternate universe with more of an sword and sorcery setting.

Tatopoulos likened the revised concept of Jankel and Morton to "a combination of BEETLEJUICE and BLADE RUNNER."

Noted Joffe of the change in directors, "In the end we separated over artistic differences. I felt the screenplay was coming out a little too young." Joffe turned to Jankel and Morton because he was impressed with

## CARTOON TYPECASTING

**"I didn't like the script at first and I really didn't want to do another kid's film," said Bob Hoskins. "I'd done ROGER RABBIT and HOOK, I didn't want to become like Dick Van Dyke."**

their work on MAX HEADROOM. "I thought they would have the unique visual sensibilities to bring this animated world to life. They came up with the idea of Dinoyark, this parallel world that, in a way, has sprung from ours."

Joffe said that he had worked closely with Morton and Jankel, bringing his feature film experience to their familiarity with television and commercials production. "Directing a film is a little like commanding an air-craft carrier," said Joffe. "It takes a lot of crew and about four-and-a-half-miles to stop. A commercial or a television show is rather like

driving a small speed boat. You can spin it on a six pence and if that's what you choose to do, nobody gets hurt. I hope that they have found me a very creative and supportive arm to lean on. They are very imaginative, and it was a delight watching that imagination grow."

Noted Hoskins of the husband and wife directing team, "They have got a single mind. At first I thought it was going to be very confusing, with one idea from one, and another idea from the other, but it wasn't. They're also very good with actors, which is unusual with people coming out of commercials. When they get to the set, they know what they want."

Woods was comfortable with the switch to Jankel and Morton because he had worked with them before, at Digital Effects in New York in 1980. "They were graphic designer/animators at the time," said Woods. The delay in getting the film under way actually turned out to be a blessing. "In that time digital technology has gone forward a little bit," said Woods. "Originally I thought we would be lucky to do maybe half of the film digitally, but now we will be able to do virtually all of the effects digitally."

Woods' effects chores on SUPER MARIO BROS ranged from the use of innovative 3-D mattes (see page 15) to more mundane tasks. "The simplest shot I would be involved in would be a wire removal shot," said Woods. Extensive wire work in the film involved flying the brothers in their "power boots" and targeting the flame balls of Koopa's Goomba henchmen, using rockets on guidewires.

On the set special effects supervisor Paul Lumbardi is fond of explaining how in the past the wires used for flying harnesses or guiding fireballs had to be very fine to be invisible to

## DINOYARK PROPS

Paul Lumbardi's title is special effects supervisor, but he likes to point out that most of what he does is really prop shop work. Lumbardi runs Special Effects Unlimited, a company founded by his father, based at Riverwood Studios near Atlanta. Lumbardi provided SUPER MARIO BROTHERS with a fleet of cars for crashing, props like the fully operational Goomba flamerguns, and wire work to make Bob Hoskins and John Leguizamo super flyers.

Demonstrating the flame gun, Lumbardi noted its off-camera connection to a suitcase-sized battery pack and a tank of propane. The trigger, designed for operation by the Goomba's three-fingered hand, dispenses a jet of propane under pressure past a set of electrodes which ignite the gas into a big puff of



Marios, armed with devolution Devo guns.

flame about a foot in diameter. Lumbardi rigged fireballs on the set as rockets, traveling 200 feet, on a wire. With a little work, Lumbardi's "fireballs" will appear to knock down walls.

On a studio workbench Lumbardi's crew was seen assembling the sheets of fungus that hang like a shroud over much of Dinoyark.

Lumbardi rigged some of the fungus to act as tentacles, cable puppets operated by joy sticks, able to reach out, touch and wrap around their victims.

One entire room of Lumbardi's shop in Wilmington, is devoted to making icicles from safety glass. The liquid compound is poured into a mold, with a wire inserted for hanging before it solidifies. The icicle props are for a scene of the Mario Brothers being chased through an ice tunnel, riding an improvised sled. The glass ice is not slick, however, calling for another Lumbardi special effect prop to complete the scene. The brothers' sled rolls down the five-degree drop on skateboard wheels. All 20 wheels must turn in the same direction at the same time to work. □

# SUPER MARIOS

## DESIGNING DINOHATTAN

*BLADE RUNNER* production designer  
David L. Snyder remakes New York.

By William Wilson  
Goodson, Jr.

For production designer David L. Snyder (*BLADE RUNNER*, *BILL & TED'S BOGUS JOURNEY*) the first step in designing *SUPER MARIO BROTHERS* was a tour of deserted factories around the U.S. Before settling on the Ideal Concrete factory in Wilmington, North Carolina, Snyder and the production team visited various sites nationwide. "We considered another location in eastern Texas, a sister facility, but it was near ruins," said Snyder. "It was impossible to film there because of the safety factor."

Why a deserted factory? From the first it was obvious *SUPER MARIO BROTHERS* was going to require a number of enormous sets. An already existing steel and concrete structure has drawbacks, but designing the sets to fit allowed most of the money to be spent on scenery, rather than something holding it up. The occasional crumbling spots were used to help produce the effect of a decaying, failing world.

Snyder beamed with pride as he provided a tour of the concrete facility-turned-Dinoyark. First stop, the Boom Boom Bar, a bare room being transformed into a tough leather joint. The patrons don't wear leather—their skin is leather. "It has been constructed around the existing concrete columns to give it more scale," said Snyder. "We will take my office [a room with a window overlooking the bar] and make it into the disc jockey's booth."

Snyder pointed to a metal



**SUPER MARIO BROS** producer Roland Joffe, demanding designs with a high degree of realism.

grid installed over a well in the factory floor. "We built this entire platform, because with 14 feet below we can have a lot of light pouring up. Under usual soundstage conditions you might put the platform up two feet and try to have lights underneath. But under here we can have really powerful lights, and add steam and fog effects."

Outside the bar set is an elevated sidewalk beside a major city street, a story above ground level. Snyder noted "this presents a unique

opportunity to be inside the club, and see all the action out on the street, to give it a more realistic look. Across the street you will be able to look into the club."

Visible is the outline of the two-level city street under construction, with shops and business on the second level walkway, traffic on the ground. The two walkways are constructed across already existing concrete piles. Above the shop roofs there are still several feet up to the ceiling of the enormous room, making it possible to put cameras and lights at a number of angles at

Dinoyark's jail, where the Bros are booked, deloused and briefly incarcerated, actually stacks of scrap metal shipping containers converted to cells by Snyder.



Snyder made full use of the film's concrete factory production base, turning the mammoth pipe of its kiln furnace into the subway set excavated by Daisy.

any point on the street.

"We took basic New York architecture and New York elements," said Snyder, "but it's more aggressive because it's a carnivorous society that descended from the dinosaurs." One of the shops is a plain but completely equipped doughnut shop. "Drippies' Doughnuts," said Snyder, reading the sign. "Those are raw meat doughnuts. People are into meat here." No shots are planned to take place in "Drippies," but it must be ready if the camera should focus in the window's direction.

Snyder pointed to a pile of cars which have been crushed and mangled. "It's sort of like a kid's idea of the world. There are no traffic lights, no traffic patterns, cars just go and bang into one another." When there is a parking violation they just take the car, crush it, and put it in a pile.

"Aggressive! Aggressive! It's taking everything in New York and raising it to the 10th power!

"They have no [fossil fuels] because dinosaurs were never extinct in this world. Everything runs on electricity. The reason there is no wood visible is they have used up all their resources. There is nothing left."

The street, Koopa Square, is only 200-feet long, leading to an enormous pair of outside doors. At times the doors will be blocked off by a giant tent to resemble a construction sight. Other times, with matte paintings and composites, vehicles driving out the doors will appear to be on another stretch of the street. The set cost a million dollars, give or take a few. □



Hopper with Fiona Shaw as Lena, his reptilian girlfriend. Though evolved from the dinosaurs, a lizard look was rendered mostly with straight makeup and hair.

the camera. Now that the wires are removed optically, they have to be large, sometimes colored orange, so the visual effects people can be sure to find them.

The technical crew on the production all commented on the continuous changes, large and small, in the script and staging during production. Several used the term "mutation"

to describe the way the film's story changed and developed. On the set, production designer David L. Snyder pointed to the film's de-evolution chamber as a prime example of how ideas developed. Hopper as Dinoyark's villainous King Koopa uses the device to turn citizens into his lizard-like Goomba henchmen. The original sketches for the device by creative il-

## ARCADE VERSIMILITUDE

“The level of realism is very, very high,” said producer Roland Joffe. “The key to the movie is to say that the characters have to be believable, even the ones who are really odd.”

lustrator Simon Murton (UNIVERSAL SOLDIER) featured an actual chamber. But Snyder discovered two giant cone-shaped coal hoppers in the deserted cement plant that served as a studio and these quickly became the basis of the de-evolution machines.

**S**nyder made full use of the film's concrete factory studio base in designing the sets. The subway in which Daisy excavates is a pasteboard cave with the tunnel created with a huge 200-foot wide pipe, part of the factory's kiln furnace.

Showing off the Goomba barracks Snyder noted, “This

was the compressor room in the factory. The compressors were on the concrete blocks. The coil springs come from some of the cars we junked and we put mattresses on top. Everything was already in here except for the dressing. It was so good, I decided not to mess with it too much.” Overlooking the nine-foot beds is a poster “Be All A Goomba Can Be.”

The adjoining police station set, where Mario and Luigi are jailed after being arrested in Dinoyark, consisted of several large factory booths and offices made of wood. Since there is no wood in Dinohattan—with no “fossil fuels” the reptiles have burned it all—Snyder covered the wood with metal sheets studded with decorative rivets. The cells behind the offices are enormous stacks of cages, originally the factory's scrap metal shipping containers. Prisoners are transported in cells by forklift, stacked over 20 feet off the ground. The level of police work in Dinohattan can be deduced from a poster that forbids officers to refuse bribes.

Snyder likes to design expansive sets. “All production designers like to have big gigantic shots where you can see as much as possible,” he said. “[Jankel and Morton] are oriented toward the small screen. You see a lot of pictures that are appropriate to television.”

Joffe insisted the film's long development and the constant changes on the set weren't a problem, comparing the making of the film to the enveloping fungus that pervades Dinoyark. “For me a screenplay is never finished,” said Joffe. “You work a screenplay all the time. When you bring actors in a screenplay goes through another evolution. So you can say that rather like the fungus in the movie the screenplay constantly evolves.”

## DINOSAUR MAKEUPS

Though the denizens of Dinoyark are descended from the dinosaurs, reptilian features to indicate their ancestry were given to the cast in varying degrees. Makeup artist Jeff Goodwin and hairstylist Michelle Johnson gave Dennis Hopper as King Koopa a hairdo with a scaly look. Hopper was also required to shave off his eyebrows and body hair for a very smooth-skinned reptilian appearance. Goodwin noted the lack of hair makes Hopper look more muscular and sleeker, a technique he also used on RAMBO III.

Fiona Shaw as Lena, Koopa's reptilian girlfriend, was given scales running down her spine for a bathing scene. Goodwin fashioned the scales from bald cap material, a translucent plastic he flesh-colored before mold-



“Ratosauruses” by Makeup Effects Labs.

ing. Shaw plucked her eyebrows, and used cosmetic ones drawn up to a point, accentuated with a greenish/yellowish eye shadow.

Goodwin also supervised prosthetics for seven half-lizard characters, extras for the Boom Boom Club (a la the STAR WARS cantina) and other scenes. Goodwin also brought in

New Jersey makeup artist Vincent Guastini to assist. Due to a lack of time—only two weeks—the makeups were designed from scratch on life casts of the performers. “Most of them are what we call ‘partial appliances,’” said Guastini. “Sort of like Lone Ranger masks. They cover part of the face and then fade off, to give the impression of dinosaur/lizard-features trying to fight through a human face. Contacts and false teeth completed the designs.

Guastini's favorite is the Dragon Man, with a full crown of horns, sculpted in just two days, fitted with foam latex gloves, sporting long, threatening nails.

Goodwin's favorite is Crocodile Man, featuring a mouth that ranges from human to a reptilian. “It's comical and frightening,” he said. □

# SUPER MARIOS

## SPECIAL VISUAL EFFECTS

*State-of-the-art digital effects include the first extensive use of 3-D mattes, fantasy rendered on a grand scale.*

By William Goodson Jr.

The visual effects of SUPER MARIO BROS, designed by Chris Woods, feature the use of 3-D matte paintings, computer graphics technology first utilized, according to Woods, in Steven Spielberg's HOOK. "We are using them where somebody else might use a large, rather expensive model," said Woods. "With a 3-D matte painting we can move all around and it will seem to move in perspective."

One of the more striking shots planned for the film is a scene of Dinohattan on the horizon, as Mario and Luigi circle it in a garbage truck. The perspective change on the painting is achieved by scanning the flat art into a computer. The image is mapped dimensionally, shaded, with surface textures added to create the illusion of depth. But why paint it? Why not render the entire setting digitally? Noted Woods, "The computer is very



Bob Hoskins as Mario emerging out of Dinohattan, digital composite supervised by Chris Woods. Inset: The blue screen live-action plate of Hoskins prior to animation.

good at calculating true perspective for any given lens, but it is not good at the kind of detail a matte painter is.

SUPER MARIO BROS 3-D mattes are generated using NetRenderMan, a new program used on this production for the first time. "RenderMan has been available as a high-quality renderer for a number of years," said Woods. "NetRenderMan actually runs on a net-

Hoskins and John Leguizamo as Mario and Luigi, propelled by their power boots up through the skylight. Inset: With flying wires before digital magic.

work between Macintosh and any number of other computers. In this case, we are using Macintosh and Silicon Graphics Inc. machines.

"Basically, the 3-D modeling and the animation are being done on a Macintosh but the actual rendering of the images, at very high resolution, film resolution, is done between the Macintosh and the SGI workstations."

The standard RenderMan program allows the operator to assign shades and textures to surfaces. Before, using these features to help add a 3-D effect would have been too complex because it was necessary to split the image into several pieces or layers. Each piece would then be rendered on a separate computer and finally composited together, a time consuming process. Noted Woods, "[Network rendering] programs allow the operator to work on the whole image at a single computer, while the program hunts through the net-

work of interconnected computers seeking processing time to perform the necessary computations. It allows you to put artists on a simpler machine, and yet have the power of a device like the SGI, that is much more technically difficult to work with."

Woods estimated that actual 3-D modeling will only constitute four or five shots in SUPER MARIO BROS. Most computer graphics applications will deal with image compositing or image manipulations of two dimensional effects like removing wires from wire shots. Noted Woods, "We are using two packages, Flame, written in Australia, and Eddie, out of Canada. Both are brand new, never used on a production, as far as I know, and both run on Silicon Graphics." □

Daisy emerges through rock. Bottom: Samantha Mathis (l) and composite.



# THE DARK HALF

**Horror meister George Romero films Timothy Hutton as King's Jekyll & Hyde.**

*By Charles Leayman*

Director George Romero has been responsible for putting Pittsburgh on the map as a filmmaking town since he made *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* in 1967. Pittsburgh has been the site of most of Romero's own productions and host to others like Jonathan Demme's *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*. As Romero modestly explained on the set of *THE DARK HALF*, "I feel comfortable working here." Orion Pictures planned to open Romero's adaptation of Stephen King's bestseller in April, delayed a full year by the studio's brush with bankruptcy.

King noted that the premise of his 484-page novel sprang from the real-life revelation of his having written works pseu-

Rutanya Alda as Miriam Crowley, the writer who dies to uncover Stark's true identity, makeup by Optic Nerve.



Winged "psychopomps," the mythic transporters of the souls of the dead, mass in the sky to take George Stark to Hell, optical effects by Visual Concept Engineering.

donymously as "Richard Bachman" (though without any of the book's ensuing mayhem). Budgeted at approximately \$15 million, the production stars Timothy Hutton as horror writer Thad Beaumont, Amy Madigan as Thad's wife Liz, Michael Rooker (from *HENRY: PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER*) as Sheriff Alan Pangborn, and the distinguished stage and screen actress Julie Harris as eccentric professor Reggie DeLesseps (who, as "Rawlie" DeLesseps, is male in the book, a role that was originally considered for Michael Gough and John Hurt, among others). Though King's setting is characteristically Maine, Romero's adopted hometown and neighboring Washington County are stand-

ing in for the author's rural and suburban New England.

Principal shooting began in October of 1990. Over a hasty lunch Romero took the time to unwind about *THE DARK HALF*, Stephen King, and the horror genre. Orion put the project together with lightning speed specifically for Romero, who enjoys the story's "relatively small canvas" (*a la MONKEY SHINES*). Working for a "major" is admittedly a very different process from the former independence of his Laurel Entertainment features: for one thing, "It takes longer to tell 100 people something than 20."

While affirming Orion's welcome hands-off approach (a sentiment strongly echoed by producer Declan Baldwin),

Romero is determined to keep the "small film" option always open. His self-description as basically "a little theatre guy" both emphasizes his love for communal filmmaking with familiar friends and colleagues, and distinguishes his uncontested ability to mold a large-scale crew into creative coherence (with characteristic tact, he lauded those "key players who keep the set modest").

For *THE DARK HALF* Romero utilized reliable stand-bys like production designer Cletus Anderson and his wife, costume designer Barbara Anderson, editor Pat Buba, assistant director Nick Mastandrea and more recent associates like makeup artists John Vulich and Everett Burrell. A new "key player" is cinematographer Tony Pierce-Roberts, whose credits include *A ROOM WITH A VIEW*, *SLAVES OF NEW YORK*, *MR. AND MRS. BRIDGE* and *WHITE FANG*, and whose services became available because of Orion's financial backing. "The only time I ever jotted down the name of a director of photography was right after seeing *A ROOM WITH A VIEW*," said Romero. "I thought the visuals in that were outstanding. And now I've been given a chance to work with the man himself."

As for *THE DARK HALF*, Romero noted, "I've worked often with the Jekyll-Hyde theme, with the idea of 'the monster within.' It's what





The birds attack Hutton as Stark, actually a fully mechanized puppet designed and built by Optic Nerve, effects supervised by John Vulich and Everett Burrell.

makes me empathetic to Steve's 'autobiographical' take on *THE DARK HALF* [referring to the Bachman analogy], empathetic to whatever it is that makes us do what we do." Queried about the horror genre's taking the pulse of contemporary American life, Romero conceded that the linkage of the two illuminates King's particular strength. "Steve's right in the stew; he weaves America right into it. The best part of reading him is that he creates a whole world. He has a great way of taking the average guy's insensitivity to his surroundings and making that a part of the grim picture." Romero paused, then found the term he wanted. "And there's that whole idea of 'random selection' which Steve makes very much a part of his work, and I still find very hard to do."

"Random selection" has prompted Romero to state his

own preference for an "EC Comics morality" where evil doers satisfyingly reap the gruesome rewards of their wickedness ("not necessarily for sex, however," he added, quick to distance himself from the slasher genre's facile equation of sexuality and instant retribution). It explains the obvious relish with which he filmed King's EC-inspired script for *CREEPSHOW*. But Romero has to admit that, along with *PSYCHO*, *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* seminally introduced "random selection" as a staple element in the post-'60s horror film, wherein fictional characters with whom an audience may choose to identify have no security guarantees and can end up as messily slaughtered as the opposing team.

Which leads naturally to a discussion of the Motion Picture Association of America's

ratings for such films. "The MPAA is not always fair with dispensing ratings," said Romero. "A few individual board members do try to make fine distinctions. There is a natural prejudice, an inherent bias against films perceived as 'horror' pictures." Unfortunately, it's a bias shared by audiences and distributors. As Romero eloquently put it, "You'll always be the poor relation. Of course people are going to give an 'Excellent' to a picture like *DANCES WITH WOLVES*, not least because it's loaded with signifiers of 'quality.' But not even people who loved *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* are going to term it 'Excellent,' precisely because of the nature of the material." Romero chuckled and, assuming a mock Bill-and-Ted inflection, said, "Except for some kid's thinking it E-X-C-E-L-L-E-N-T!"

Romero does not consider *THE DARK HALF* to be a "genre" picture, but rather a "naturalistic" allegory with fantasy elements attached. As for the graphic violence in King's novel, he felt that MPAA considerations will automatically help to redress the balance between requisite gore and the book's "essential substance, which I like immediately."

Which is? "The monster is you." Romero's brown eyes took on a gentle seriousness as he informally voiced a personal ethos. "A problem for me is trying to take the 'grim' out-



Hutton as Stark, forehead and cheek prosthetics sculpted and applied by Vulich, a three-to-four-hour job daily.

look. I don't think of myself as necessarily pessimistic, but I am extremely cynical. It enables me to take the grim outlook and talk about it as a possibility, but yet be outrageously comic while doing it. I think, 'Well, that lightens the load, doesn't it? But somehow it doesn't. And I think that happens to Steve sometimes, too. The material becomes more bizarre, more garish, than was originally intended, just because the grim outlook takes over.'

The Italian Marxist Antonio Grasci's famous dictum on the

Thousands of sparrows mass to attack Stark at the climax, miniature and optical effects by VCE, the most complex avian sequences since Hitchcock's *THE BIRDS*.



# THE DARK HALF

## MAKEUP EFFECTS

*Optic Nerve's Everett Burrell and John Vulich on working with Romero.*

By Charles Leayman

In a modestly shabby Lawrenceville section of Pittsburgh (right next door to mentor Tom Savini's hometown of Bloomfield), in a large, old building which the casual passerby might think deserted, makeup artist John Vulich and Everett Burrell used Savini's former workshop as the birthplace for THE DARK HALF's special mechanical effects, the home base for their Optic Nerve Effects operation. The shop's walls are lined with posters: Romero films, of course, Dolph Lundgren epics, MANIAC, DEATH-DREAM, MONSTER ON THE CAMPUS, the hirsute face of Chaney's Wolfman. On a wall near the entrance are storyboard frames depicting Stark's death throes (the work of artists Peter Von Sholly and Rick Catizone). Crew members sit at worktables throughout the shop, toiling over the torsos and limbs required by Romero's script.

Lying about are anat-

my books with disconcertingly graphic illustrations of viscera and skin diseases, volumes which the crew carefully studies to garner inspiration for its designs. Vulich and Burrell are keenly sensitive to the demand for effects realism, and mindful of fans' built-in sense of "reality" regarding makeup effects. As Burrell put it, "a smear of white in a slash wound that would ask for blue, red or purple, lends subliminal verisimilitude." (For NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, they even studied photographs of concentration camp victims, not from

any morbid fascination with human anguish, but in a dedicated attempt to authentically transfer real-life horrors to the displaced sanctuary of the fantasy film.)

Props abound. On one table lies a disturbingly life-like arm with hand attached, the webbed fold between thumb and forefinger punctured by a self-inflicted pencil wound. A thin shaft of light pierces the wound's tiny circumference, a detail from King's book that Romero insisted upon. Nearby a plaster cast of Peter Lorre's face is being used as a model for the "shattered face" effect that Liz Beaumont undergoes; the fringe of "feminine" curls circling Lorre's waxen features gives the face a perversely antic grotesqueness.

Amy Madigan's own life-cast wears a mask-like, removable face made of dental wax ("like the shell of a Klondike bar," said the sandy-haired Burrell), behind which grins a skull carved from sculptor's clay. Liz's crumbling face occurs in a dream sequence and proved to be one of the most difficult effects to achieve. Romero told the effects people that he wanted Liz's face to implode, but with a skull visible beneath: "a look of relaxation," said Vulich. "Almost as if the figure just fell apart." To indicate what he had in mind, "George mentioned those little plastic Disneyland figures of Pluto and Mickey Mouse that are held together by strings that



Timothy Hutton as Stark, "losing cohesion"—decomposing—prosthetics sculpted and applied by Vulich, contact lenses by Dr. Mitchell Cassel.

keep them taut. When you push the base of the puppet, the figure just collapses."

Physical effects artist Carl Horner was working on a somewhat similar effect with a collapsing vase, which Liz's disintegration echoes. Horner hooked wires to buttons glued inside the dental wax vase; when they were pulled and the result shot at high speed, the vase resembled a collapsing building. Horner's brainstorm couldn't be used for Liz's face, however, due to the skull which lay only a quarter of an inch behind the surface shell of breakaway material. After a series of extensive tests using 16mm, high-speed shooting at 150 frames-per-second and video, Burrell and Vulich ended up using squibs and a combination vacuum cleaner to simulate the face's sucked-in demise, and shot it at 350 frames-per-second.

Unlike Tom Savini, Romero doesn't come from an effects background. "Tom keeps in mind limits and would never ask for something he knew was impossible," claimed Vulich, "while George will ask for anything, which makes it a great challenge. You somehow come up with it, because you want to please him. And because we don't like to say no. The irony is that you do *more* daring and *more* original work at the request of someone who really *doesn't* know." Once Romero indicated what he needed, added Burrell, "He just lets us go; just lets us do what we want. He's probably the best director we've worked with in terms of giving us freedom." □

Vulich touches up Hutton, method makeup to match a "method" performance. Left: Amy Madigan as dream Liz-turned-porcelain, a wax face rigged to explode.





**“Stephen King weaves America right into it,” observed Romero. “He has a great way of making the insensitivity of the average guy a part of the grim picture.”**

necessity for “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will” came to mind, and Romero responded with an emphatic “That’s it, exactly!” Called back to the set, Romero returned his attention to the practical matters at hand, back once more on that artistic tightrope that both he and King tread between imaginative horror and cautious hope.

On the set, Timothy Hutton, who portrays both English teacher Thad Beaumont and his ghastly alter ego George Stark, emerged from a trailer whose inside door is emblazoned with a “Misfits Of Brutality” poster, its tortured letters evoking the classic *Famous Monsters of Filmland* logo. The actor was unavailable for comment, but as he passed by, his darkly clad Stark persona bore the aura of ultra-interiorized concentration that one associates with Hutton’s personality. Ever since winning an Oscar as the guilt-racked son in *ORDINARY PEOPLE*, Hutton has embodied onscreen the ever-sensitive idealist whose innocent facade conceals painfully private secrets. In George Stark, he has found a potent vehicle for unveiling a heretofore unseen aspect of his dramatic self—his “dark half,” as it were.

To develop Stark’s character, Hutton (who came to the film late in pre-production) placed himself in the agile hands of special makeup effects supervisors John Vulich and Everett Burrell. Between them they’ve worked on five Romero projects: *DAY OF THE DEAD*, *MONKEY SHINES*, *TWO EVIL EYES*, the recent *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* remake and *THE DARK HALF*. Native Californians, the two found working in Pittsburgh with George Romero a continually stimulating experience and the character of George Stark a definite challenge.

Unlike a Freddy Krueger or Darkman, Stark’s makeup had to be relatively natural,” said Vulich, “which means it had to be a lot subtler than what we’d done before. Stark after all is a person, not a zombie.” Their initial inspiration was a black-and-white photograph from Richard Avedon’s *In the Amer-*



Director George Romero (l), cinematographer Tony-Pierce Roberts, and effects supervisor Everett Burrell (r), filming writer Thad Beaumont’s brain surgery.

ican West that depicted a weathered, wind-bitten cowboy type with a face of silent meanness. From it sprang Stark’s “white trash look”—sideburns, ducktail, greased-back hair.

According to Burrell, “The naturalistic base that Hutton wanted was a kind of safeguard that kept us from going off in the *DARKMAN* direction. Stark had to be gross and disgusting. He had to repulse Liz in their scenes together, but he had to keep this attractiveness (in fact, to exert a subtle sexual pull). If he were too gross, people wouldn’t be able to stare at him for very long. And if we went overboard, the character’s feelings wouldn’t ‘play’ through the makeup (as with *DARKMAN*: When he’s sad or happy, you can’t tell.)”

Burrell admitted that he would have liked to cover Hutton “head-to-toe with makeup,” to have made Stark a more visually spectacular emanation of Thad’s repressed underside. But he and his partner remained within the parameters of Hutton’s instincts about the role, not least because of the intelligence, intensity, and genuine enthusiasm with which he

voiced them.

When it came time to actually apply Stark’s makeup, the trio convened in what the f/x magicians call their “Method Makeup Trailer.” “We stuck Rustler posters and heavy metal posters all over the place, and blasted Tim with Led Zepelin and Guns ‘N Roses while we worked the makeup,” said Burrell, “trying to get him and ourselves in a real George Stark mood. On the very first day, John and I ordered pizzas and threw them all over the walls, littered the floor with beer and coke cans and generally turned the place into a pigsty. Tim got into it as inspiration for the character and absorbed the atmosphere along with our makeup. Of course, finally, the place just started to stink, the novelty wore off, and we had to clean up our act a bit.”

Hutton shared with Vulich an interest in Jungian archetypes and took very seriously the notion of Stark as Thad’s Shadow, with all that the term implies of reciprocity between the two characters. When portraying Thad, Hutton attempted to suggest that the character

might profitably incorporate some of his twin’s less sinister qualities, such as confidence, strength, and a no-bullshit attitude to his own needs and desires. At the same time, Hutton carefully kept the two characters sequestered. Hutton requested two separate trailers, one for each character-half and it was rumored that he engaged two hotel rooms in which to sleep on alternate nights, depending on whose persona he inhabited. On “Stark days,” Hutton frequently filled the slow time between takes with pumped-up servings of Aerosmith, Jimi Hendrix and Southern rock bands, priming himself for Stark’s “good ol’ boy” outbursts. (As to what Hutton’s listening tastes are on “Thad days,” no one said.)

**T**HE DARK HALF’s “Birdland” is located in an old plywood manufacturing factory on South 4th Street, not far from the corporate hub of downtown Pittsburgh. In King’s novel, untold numbers of sparrows signal the birth and emergence of George Stark, ultimately tearing him apart and wafting his remains off to perdition. Birdland’s supervisor and bird coordinator is Mark Harden who had to bring THE DARK HALF’s stupendous avian scenes to the screen. Harden has worked with Animal Actors of Hollywood for over 13 years and most recently oversaw the spider shenanigans of *ARACHNOPHOBIA*.

For THE DARK HALF, Harden used nearly 5000 cut-throat finches (so named for the scarlet band surrounding the males’ necks and ghoulishly appropriate in the present context). Finch metabolism is hardier than that of actual sparrows and so this colorful African species is standing in for their domestic cousins. Training props are visible throughout the compound’s airy length. A modified circus cart-like enclosure (8 ft x 6 ft x 3 ft) holds 600 birds. Removable perches and a collapsible ceiling accustom them to roosting together or moving *en masse* in scenes requiring concerted action. A fake mock-up of the Beaumont study with



**“What’s it like to be a writer?” mused King. “Where do books come from? I’ve always been fascinated by the question and by people’s reasons for asking it.”**

desk, chair and book-lined shelves familiarize the finches with the script’s climactic setting—a jagged hole in the mock-study’s wall anticipates the one through which the birds will flood in a vengeful assault on George Stark.

Off to one side in an abandoned cubicle, a dummy victim lies waiting for another round in the bird offensive. Repeated channelings aimed at this hapless figure make the birds less skittish about actual human beings. The wings of the female finches (who closely resemble sparrows) are then selectively clipped. When forced to move, they alight on the nearest object. By making a live actor the nearest available perch, Harden and his crew are thus able to overcome the birds’ natural instinct not to settle on human beings.

Asked to compare his DARK HALF assignment to Ray Berwick’s legendary work on Alfred Hitchcock’s THE BIRDS, Harden spoke of the changes that have occurred in thinking about animals. “You can’t just dump thousands of birds onto a set anymore. It’s immoral and against what people are willing to tolerate in the treatment of animals on a film set.” Harden’s approach is to utilize and funnel an animal’s particular proclivities in order both to derive the maximum from its performance and to best protect the animal.

**G**letus Anderson is a soft-spoken gentleman and usually not given to hyperbole. He and his wife Barbara were personally asked by Romero to work on THE DARK HALF as, respectively, production and costume designer, soon after the director signed the Orion contract. The pair has contributed to almost every Romero project since KNIGHTRIDERS (1981). As soon as he read King’s novel, Anderson began to visualize the story’s physical look. His biggest challenge lay in the sheer number of different locales involved, from Maine’s upscale houses and rural police stations to Manhattan’s sleek apartments and sinister tenements. All of the necessary sites were found



Romero directs at the gravesite of George Stark, Beaumont’s fictional alter ego.

or reconstructed in Pittsburgh and nearby Washington. The only residence fabricated from scratch was the Beaumont’s Castle Rock Lake house, for which Anderson and his crew designed and built an exterior facade. Completed in six weeks, the barn-sided shell, with its brown and green trim and subtly Victorian style, was detailed down to the leaves clogging its roof gutters.

One of Anderson’s most exhausting of DARK HALF chores was outfitting the Beaumont study for its climactic destruction by legions of winged “psychopomps” (the mythic transporters of the souls of the dead). “The entire set was sectionalized so that the walls and shelving could be quickly pulled away and apart to facilitate camera movement and the wire cages from which the trained finches flew.” Besides shelves rigged to collapse on cue, Anderson had to rig individual books to fall to the floor

or remain shelfbound during repeated takes that required exact duplication of the set’s original appearance.

As for working with Romero, Anderson found him “always open to and respectful of ideas. In fact, part of the fun “is in trying to please somebody like George” (a common observation of the director’s colleagues). Asked if the magnitude of Orion’s investment altered Romero’s working methods, Anderson agreed that the increased budget has exerted greater pressure on Romero in his roles as writer and director. Also, “George is a perfectionist, never really satisfied. He’s always searching further and further.” Nonetheless, whether working for a major or as an independent, “George is very accessible, always available when you need him.”

Anderson also worked on a “half-scale gravity set” that reproduced the Beaumont study to half-size. The model con-

struction was turned on end, cameras placed beneath the bottom rim and aimed upwards and birds were poured through an aperture 20 feet above, seeming to dive directly toward the lens. (Everett Burrell confided that the 10,000 birds used in the shot were fake ones with fabric wings, purchased at a flower boutique!)

Burrell and John Vulich refer to themselves as “Method Makeup Artists.” Like George Romero, Vulich and Burrell were both “only children” (with all the playful ambiguity the term implies), who at an early age discovered television, comics, horror movies, and Aurora model kits. The difference between them and untold others with similar backgrounds and interests is that they parlayed their childhood loves into successful careers.

Vulich usually handles out-and-out makeup chores (“gluing things on people and seeing what comes to life”), while Burrell concentrates on mechanical effects (“I like creating a whole scenario that’s fake—puppets and mechanical things where humans aren’t involved”). But the division of labor regularly overlaps and the collaboration works both ways. “John will back me off,” said Burrell, “and sometimes I’ll make him go a little further, which is good.”

For the film’s climax in which Stark meets his fate, the Optic Nerve f/x team employed an animatronic puppet built by Ken Walker, a native of New Jersey. Makeup effects co-supervisor Everett Burrell set down many of the requirements for Walker’s creation, which was basically a rod puppet with some mechanical points. Romero at first requested two puppets, then asked for an additional figure, which was fashioned from unused parts with no additional strain on the budget. The first two were half-puppets used for detailed action shots. The third was a full-length figure whom the birds carry off into the night.

Stunt coordinator Phil Neilson built and designed the complicated crane rig on which each of the three puppets were mounted: one for close-ups of birds tearing at Stark’s face, an-

# THE DARK HALF

## STEPHEN KING

*Maine's master of the macabre on the production of his horror bestseller.*

By Charles Leayman

According to Stephen King, the genesis of *The Dark Half* was really *Misery*. "That book was supposed to be about what it's like to be a writer, where ideas come from," said King. "I've always been fascinated by the answer to that question, and by people's reasons for asking. What *Misery* turned out to be about was the life-saving quality of writing stories, how it takes you away and how it heals: both the people who do it and the people who consume it."

The question continued to nag. "Who am I when I write? Who is *anybody* when they write? Where does that stuff come from?" As a writer, King suggested that it comes from "nowhere," from a shrouded no-

man's land which is exactly what he wanted to chart in *The Dark Half*.

Though King disavowed wanting to write a *roman à clef* about the real-life revelation of his "Richard Bachman" alias, King realized that the situation could serve as the "blast off" for a novel. *The Dark Half's* detailing of the Thad Beaumont/George Stark expose is quite similar to its actual counterpart (though the individual who blew the whistle "wasn't a shit," according to King, "and didn't get murdered by me or anyone else!").

Why George Stark? Conjecturing on what would happen if a mainstream American author suddenly developed a "taste for slumming," and interjecting the Jekyll/Hyde theme, King decided to plumb the "nowhere" of a writer's fungoid imagination. Mused King, "You know how in the Jekyll/Hyde movies you always see the guy swallowing the stuff bubbling with dry ice? Well, that's how the writing process seems to me. I mean, I think of myself as an all-right guy. So where does all this stuff come from?"

The best real-life literary example of a Jekyll/Hyde personality that King knew was Donald Westlake, "the most civilized, urbane guy you'd ever wanna meet." Westlake is a gifted writer, who publishes quirky, distinctive novels under his own name, though he once wrote a series of queasily hard-boiled pot-boilers under the moniker "Richard Stark." (Westlake's recent screenplay for *THE GRIFTERS*, adapted from *noir* writer



George Romero and King (l) filming *CREEPSHOW* in 1981. King numbers himself among Romero's fans, but had no involvement in the making of *THE DARK HALF*.

Jim Thompson, is very much in the George Stark/"Richard Stark" vein.)

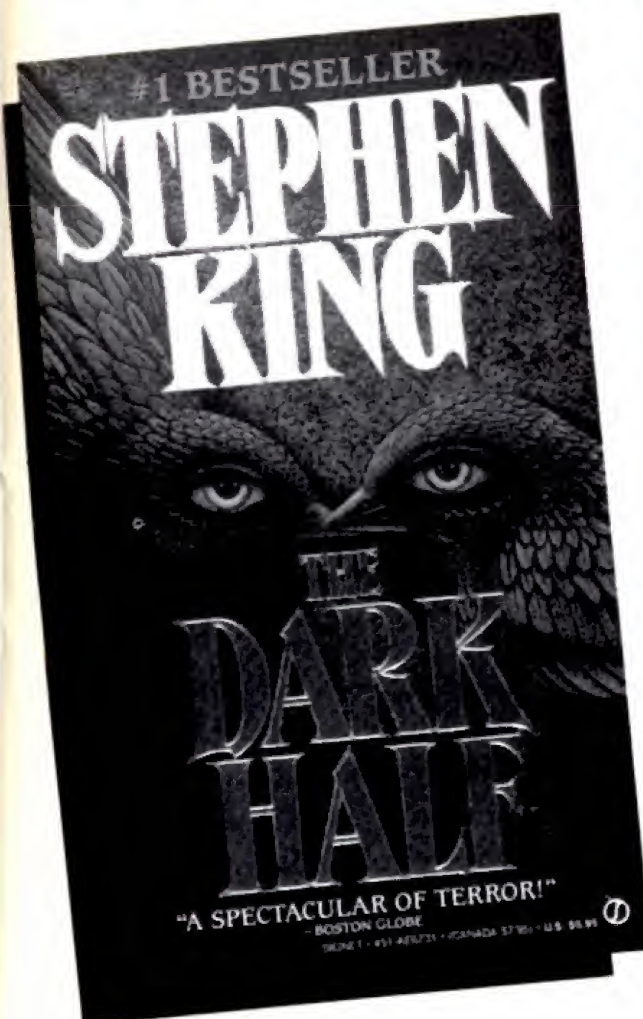
King said that he had no input in either Romero's script for *THE DARK HALF* or in cast selection. He distinguished between two kinds of film projects. The first, like last year's *SLEEPWALKERS* from King's original script, is a sort of "personal emanation" over which he assumes fairly complete control from the moment he signs the papers. Everything, from choices of director to cast, to script realization, must undergo King's sanction. With this type of project, King himself becomes the star. "I want full rights, either to participate (which is the way *I* look at it) or to meddle (which is the way *they* look at it)." When asked if he considered directing *SLEEPWALKERS* himself, King hastily exclaimed, "Oh, no! That's too much like work."

The other kind of project is *THE DARK HALF*, on which King took the money upfront. To be sure, he sold the rights to his book on learning that Romero ("a guy that I trust, whose work I admire") would direct and write

the script. Concerning Romero's beautifully streamlined screenplay, King asserted that Romero "has always been underestimated as a writer. That part of his craft is very, very good and always has been." (King had hoped to contribute a cameo as the window cleaner who winds up as one of Stark's inventive disguises, but was finally unable to do so.)

Because of his personal non-involvement with the project, King is noncommittal about *THE DARK HALF's* cast, preferring to adopt an "I'm from Missouri" attitude. (Of Amy Madigan, whose work he likes and admires, King quipped with mock lewdness, "Amy Madigan won't have to show me too much... though she can show me all she wants!")

King did quite well financially from the project, and considers it a closed issue. His final words are for *THE DARK HALF's* director: "I hope George will come out of this with his reputation enhanced, and that he'll have a big hit. He's a wonderful friend, a wonderful film director, and he deserves it." □





**“You can’t just dump thousands of birds onto a set anymore,” said bird trainer Mark Harden. “It’s immoral. People are against such a mistreatment of the animals.”**

other for wide-shots of Stark flailing about and the full-figure form. For the flailing shots, a counterweighted gimbal with cable controls was attached to the bottom of the puppet waist, giving it a realistically supple body movement that prevented the figure from seeming (as Burrell noted) “merely bolted to the floor.”

Ten mechanical birds, taxidermied and replete with real feathers and beaks, were designed by Larry O’Dien for close-up work. These actual sparrow carcasses (supplied by the Animal Control Society of Los Angeles) were constructed around vacuform shells. Needless to say, they were expensive to fashion and extremely fragile. Nearly 65 vacuform mechanical birds, with motors embedded for wing flapping, were additionally used in wide-shots.

A special “Bird Suit” was constructed for Timothy Hutton. Made of spandex, the garment was covered with plugs to which were attached the mechanical birds. Controllers manipulated the birds via dozens of wires (fed through the suit’s legs) that were connected to the plugs, enabling them to simulate the birds’ frenzied attack on the helpless Stark. A video test of the Stark puppet’s assault revealed an astonishingly life-like figure being seemingly pulled apart by equally convincing winged predators. The puppet’s eyes registered real terror and pain, no small feat given the amazing intricacy of movement necessary to simulate eye action. A gaping stomach cavity in grisly motion lends further conviction to the puppet’s actions.

To this highly impressive effect will be added (and alternated) live action, several thousand finches intermingled with their mechanical look-alikes, a stunt double, found footage of roosting birds and bluescreen plates with still more specimens—the whole achieving that densely layered look that Romero dubbed “bird soup.”

In the attic above Tom Savini’s old shop, the dissolving amber light of a late November afternoon falls on discarded specimens from earlier Vulich/Burrell collaborations: a gaping incarnation of Jason as



George Romero directs Amy Madigan and Timothy Hutton in the scene where Stark abducts the twins, Marshall, Pennsylvania standing in for King’s Maine.

a child from the FRIDAY THE 13TH films, a decapitated head from DAY OF THE DEAD, the two mutilated women’s torsos and a frozen victim from TWO EVIL EYES, and other assorted appendages and “things” nestling in corners shrouded with shadow.

“It’s gotta be fun,” said Burrell, pointing to the attic’s artifacts but referring to his craft. “John and I are lucky. I look at my shelf at home with all my Aurora model kits and look at the stop-motion figures I made as a kid, and realize that these weren’t just a hobby I abandoned at 15.” He takes acute exception to those (especially parents) who accuse horror movies of corrupting their children’s (and society’s) sensibilities. “A lot of people just don’t want to take responsibility for raising their kids. As only children, John and I were fairly introverted and had to develop our own little world, but it’s a harmless one. We both made Super-8 films as kids and that’s the spirit we’re trying to bring back, both in our effects work and in the movies we hope to make with Optic Nerve in the future. And we want to keep

working with people that we like.”

Vulich concurred. “TV sets for Everett and I became almost siblings, since we really had no other children to play with. We grew up google-eyed watching monster movies and never quite got them out of our systems. The nice thing now is that, with our work, we’re able to give back something, to contribute to the field of fantasy and genre films that we absorbed as kids for all those hours.”

**W**hen VCE effects director Kevin Kutchaver first read King’s descriptions of massed bird attacks, he thought, “I feel real sorry for the poor bastards that have to do this.” Now, months later, “Here we all are.” Kutchaver was in on THE DARK HALF from the early days of storyboarding and spent months in Pittsburgh working with Mark Harden on the live bird photography that VCE would eventually turn into optical plates. “I gave Mark our technical requirements and he gave me the birds’ physical

requirements, stipulating what they could and couldn’t do.” For example, though the optical footage demanded that the birds appear densely packed, actual birds never interact in such proximity. If they did, they would simply collide into each other and fall to the ground.

Kutchaver and Harden constructed a huge arena (“like something out of BEYOND THUNDERDOME”), with a net cage containing a 20 ft x 40 ft lit bluescreen against which thousands of birds were shot in multi-directional flight. “George wanted something very frantic, very kinetic and really packed, for the film’s finals,” said Kutchaver, “so we shot as many birds as we could.” He said that finding the right-size bird image for close-ups, medium-shots and background shots, is a tough editorial chore since the birds must always look natural no matter where they appear in a shot. “If we have a sparrow and it looks the size of a turkey, we have a problem.”

Like Everett Burrell and John Vulich, Kutchaver and VCE owner Peter Kuran were boyhood friends who grew up together (in New Jersey) and made Super-8 films (“the common glue in the f/x business,” said Kutchaver). Although he has an extensive background in still photography, animation, printing and optics, Kutchaver found working on THE DARK HALF to be a very special experience. “It was just like the old days, when you made movies just because you liked making movies, as opposed to doing them because you have a mortgage. And George is such a nice guy, you really wanna work for him.”

Like everyone else on THE DARK HALF set, producer Declan Baldwin sang George Romero’s praises, “I completely trust him creatively. He’s a master of the genre.”

But when asked for a post-production summing-up, he wistfully recounted (with tongue only half in cheek) a recent daydream about “a movie with no prosthetic effects, no animatronics, no special effects, no optical work.”

Wonder what it means? □

# THE DARK HALF

## VISUAL EFFECTS BY V.C.E.

*Visual Concept Engineering supplied miniatures, split screen and bird composites.*

By Charles Leayman

Visual Concept Engineering chief Peter Kuran served as visual effects producer on THE DARK HALF, principally creating optical effects for the bird footage that provides the movie's resounding climax. "We're doing about 70 shots," said Kuran, "using tons of birds photographed against blue-screen. For the most part, it's a technical and logistical nightmare."

Though Romero's "bird soup" called for masses of winged performers, only relatively few actual ones could be used. "You can't get real birds to do a lot of the things you want them to do. For example, they won't fly near the camera," noted Kevin Kutchaver, Kuran's effects director. "The birds' main goal in life is finding a place to sit down. Which is why we have to matte so many birds into the shot."

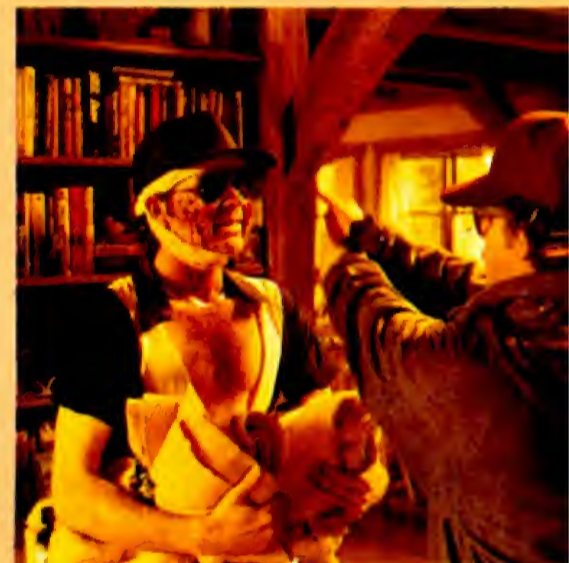
Kuran's partial rundown of

necessary opticals included: "splits" of birds massing over the house, birds reflected in people's glasses, live-action motion-control shots in which Timothy Hutton appears as both Beaumont and Stark (a la Cronenberg's DEAD RINGERS), straight split-screen shots (as where Stark lights up a cigarette and hands it to Thad).

This is the first time Kuran has worked with George Romero, though they discussed collaborating as far back as PET SEMATARY. Romero's films to date have mostly relied on non-optical special effects, but THE DARK HALF is providing an ambitious initiation into VCE's field of expertise. Right from the beginning of production, Kuran warned Romero that the effects he wanted were going to be a stretch to achieve. But as Kutchaver said, "George is looking to be honest on the screen. Having opted for film-



VCE's split-screen shot of Timothy Hutton as Thad retrieving his twins from the hands of himself as George Stark. Below: How VCE composited the scene. Left: John Amplas (the vampire of Romero's MARTIN) stands in for Hutton as Stark. Right: VCE films Hutton as Stark separately, matting his head onto Amplas' body.

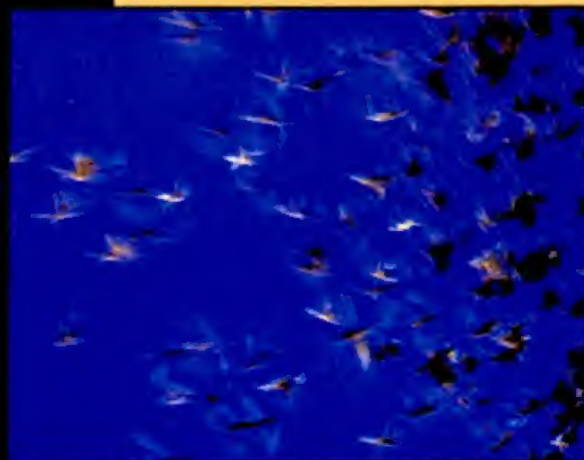


ing THE DARK HALF, he's not about to back down from its most impressive, if difficult aspect."

In an anecdote reminiscent of Romero's f/x requests to his makeup staff, Kutchaver recalled the first time he showed the director a motion-control test with Hutton and carefully explained how the new photographic technique worked. No

sooner did the information sink in than Romero began suggesting ways to make the shots even more interesting and complex. "He's a smart guy," said Kutchaver admiringly, "ready to grab an idea and go as far with it as he can. And his set has a friendly, co-op, let's-make-a-movie atmosphere and that's the best you can ask for." □

Left: Michael Rooker and Amy Madigan, battered by a hail of sparrows (actually cutthroat finches), summoned to carry George Stark off to Hell, a VCE composite. Below: The bluescreen element of flying birds VCE added to the scene. Right: The live-action plate showing the actors with the handful of birds filmed on the set.



# Spumco's Ren & Stimpy Revolution

**Cartoon creator John Kricfalusi tried to redeem an art form long corrupted.**

*By Dan Persons*

Brace yourself: THE REN & STIMPY SHOW is the best program on TV. Its fans encompass demographics that range from toddlers and teens all the way up through college students and Warner's and Disney aficionados. Even though REN & STIMPY broadcaster Nickelodeon and the company that created the show, Spumco, have since parted ways in the midst of rumors of expanding budgets, missed air-dates and battles over content, it's not unfair to say that, sparse as the episode library may be (only 27 have aired in the two years the program's been on), the show has succeeded in altering forever the notion of what televised animation is all about.

All this may be something of a surprise, especially if you fall within the age group that can easily remember the dawn of made-for-television animation—specifically such early Hanna-Barbera output as HUCKLEBERRY HOUND and YOGI BEAR. To baby-boomer eyes, REN & STIMPY's setup seems the stuff of the '50s: asthma-hound Chihuahua Ren Hoek and his

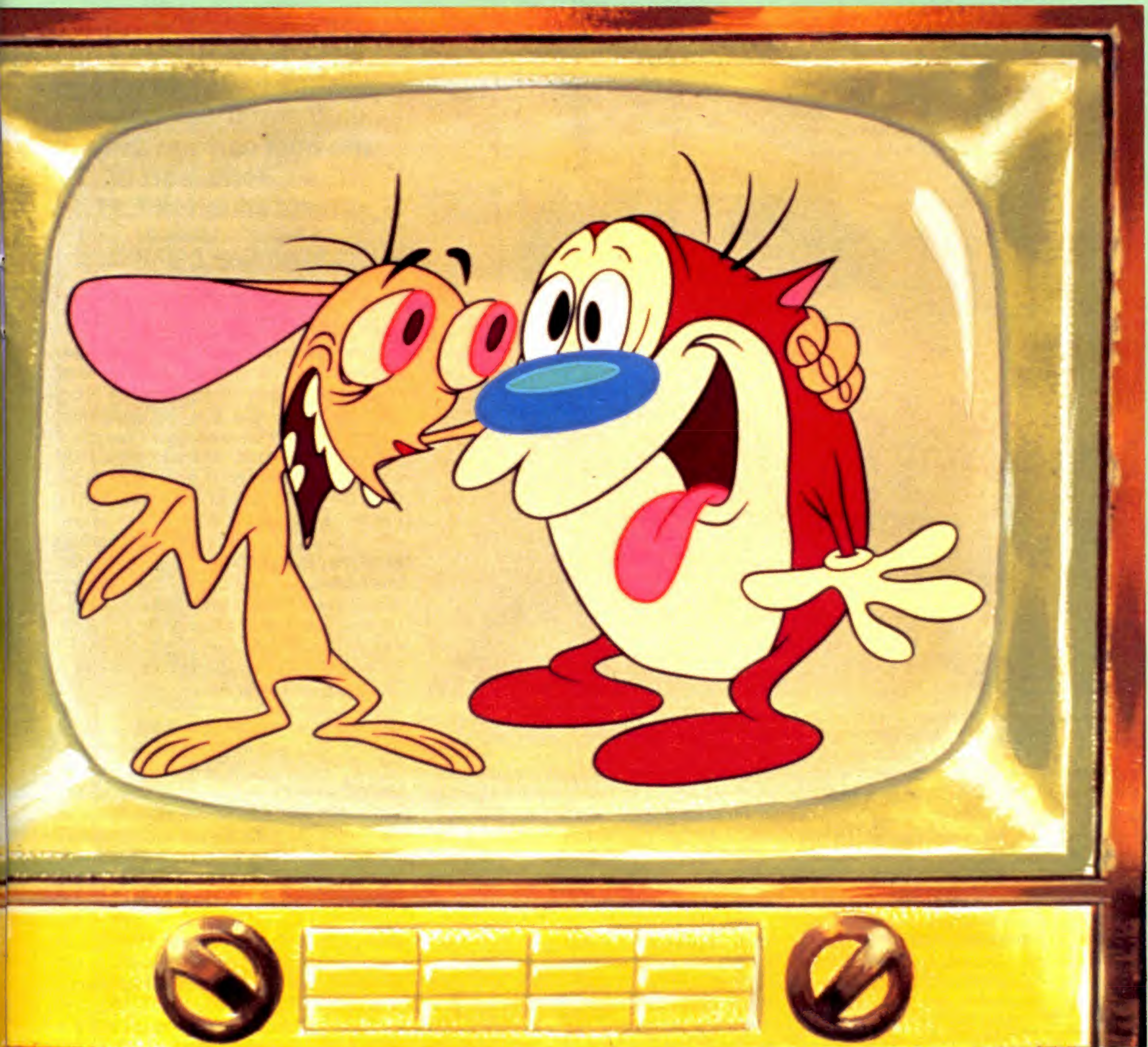


Serious about cartoons: Spumco's Kricfalusi, grabbing for an audience (or perhaps the necks of Nickelodeon execs who fired him late last year).

cat companion Stimpy go from 11-minute episode to 11-minute episode getting themselves into a variety of scrapes. They may masquerade as Dalmatians in order to win work in a firehouse or be blasted into space as "Commander Hoek and Stimpy," hearty adventurers determined to confront the unknown. Even the visual design seems a throwback to days when Danish-modern dominated the finest of living rooms, and the colors of animation backgrounds rarely lingered within the boundaries of their outlines.

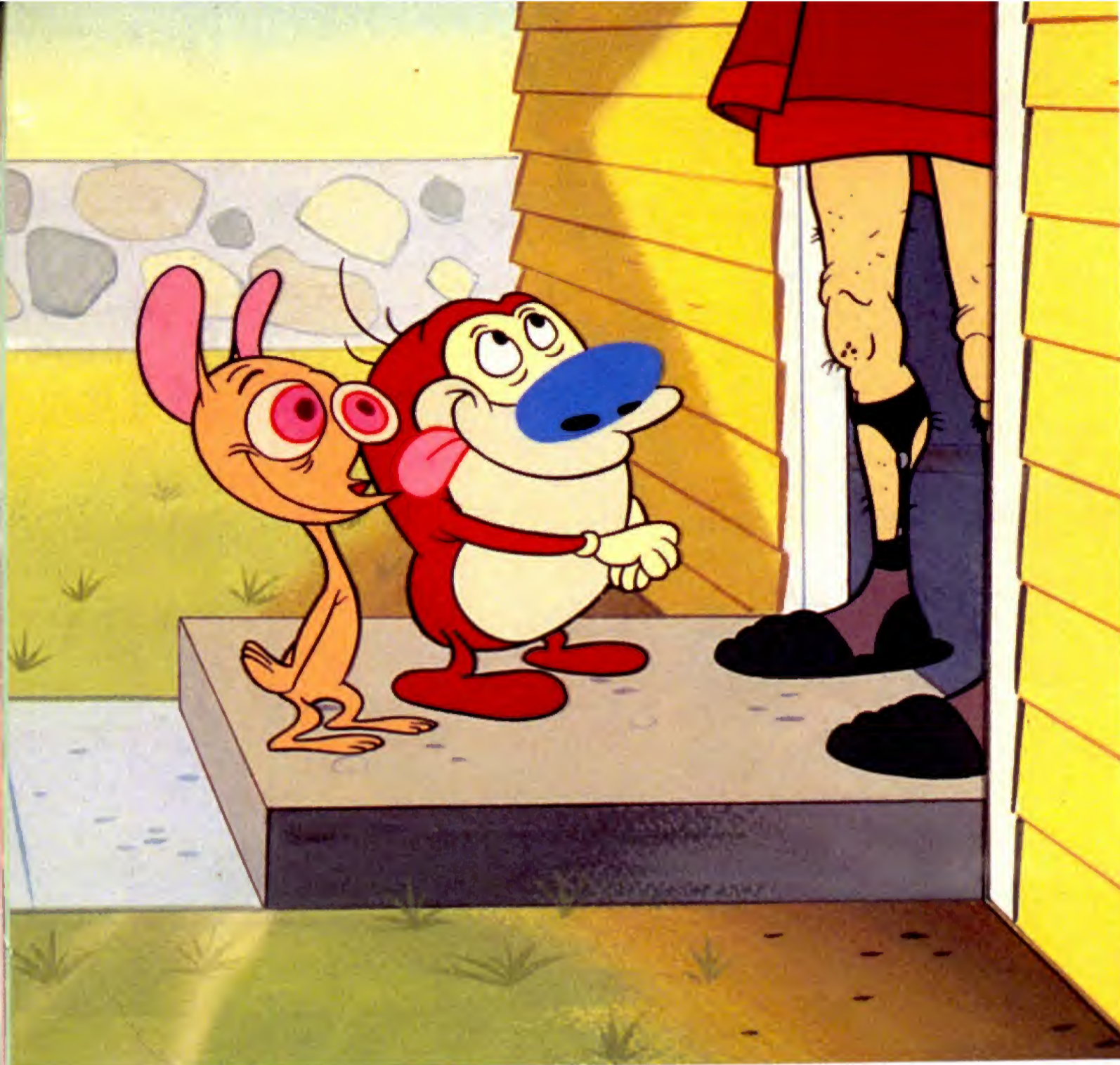
But REN & STIMPY is more than just fond nostalgia for the time of "I Like Ike" and the House Un-American Activities Committee, something that its creators are passionate in pointing out. Utter the words "post modern" to John Kricfalusi—founder of Spumco and, by acclamation of all, the heart and soul of Ren and Stimpy—and he's likely to cite back a veritable Library of Congress of sources, ranging from early vaudeville through the dawn of silent comedy through the stylings of pulp science magazines. "Anytime people see anything new that





Above: Kricfalusi imbued **THE REN & STIMPY SHOW** with the working methods of the classic Warner Bros cartoons and created a hit for Nickelodeon with demographics that spanned audiences from kids to grownups. Below: **THE RIPPING FRIENDS**, a future project in development from Kricfalusi's cartoon factory, with special thanks to Jack "King" Kirby, a sketch of the manly science fiction heroes saving the lovely Jean Poole from certain death.





Asthmatic, hyperactive Chihuahua Ren (l) and his lummock cat pal Stimpy, going door-to-door in second season's "Rubber Nipple Salesmen," hawking Stimpy's product sensation, weird stuff for a kiddie cartoon.

“[The pilot] was a chance to go out on a limb and try to make the best cartoon ever done, some sort of artistic statement.”

— Artist Bob Camp —

trails. Faces convey actual emotions, bodies move with an expressiveness all too rare for television. Physical distortion rules the day—the animators can't resist twisting their characters into new configurations, often with a zeal not seen since Clampett's passing (one episode, "Black Hole," is little more than an exercise in how many mutations the two leads can be put through in just over ten minutes). While still occasionally dependent on dialogue to carry the plotlines, *THE REN & STIMPY SHOW* has been a definite retreat from Chuck Jones' dreaded "illustrated radio." After too long a period coasting on a sea of aural exposition, animation has once again learned to carry its story-telling weight. The recovery is pure pleasure to watch.

has style of any kind," said Kricfalusi, "they instantly label it as being '50s style or retro-'50s or post-modern. More accurately, the show just has style, period. It has a wide variety of influences."

There's a definite edge to Kricfalusi's show, more than enough to raise it beyond mere post-modern vamping. Ren is no happy-go-lucky, do-it-all protagonist—he's short-tempered, high-strung, and frequently violent. Stimpy takes idiocy to new depths—he's literally a big lump who enjoys rotting his brain before the TV, when he isn't evidencing an unhealthy affection for his litter box. An episode may begin with the two homeless and half-starved, and end with the pair facing certain death. In between, there may be references to hairballs, dog-breath, and mucous sub-

stances too gross to mention in polite company. This isn't so much a child's garden of animated giggles, this is more like what kids actually talk about—amongst themselves, when the adults aren't watching, when the young ones are free to vent their fears and fascinations.

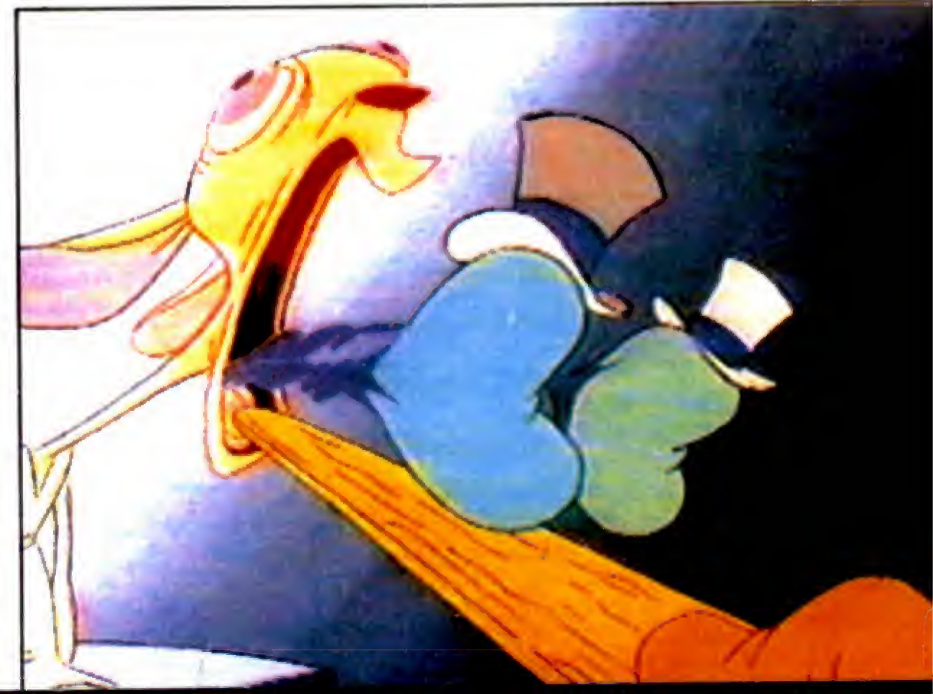
If Hanna-Barbera sounded the death-knell for quality cartoons with their low-budget, limited animation process, the creators of *REN & STIMPY* have struggled mightily to revive the corpse. While still obviously hampered by a tight budget, the producers have exhibited a determination to bring to the screen something that's less a recapitulation of the past 40 years of televised kidvid as a welcome return to the days when directors such as Bob Clampett, Tex Avery, and Chuck Jones were blazing

Unfortunately, all this has changed, now that Spumco and John Kricfalusi are out of the picture. While Nickelodeon has declared that the show will continue, produced in-house at Games Productions, a studio the company established in Los Angeles ("They don't have desks," said Kricfalusi, "but they have showers"), almost all close to the project agreed that the most vital element of the show, that of Kricfalusi's determination to restore the artist's hand to animation, has now been lost. The situation is doubly ironic in that it all started when kidvid purveyor Nickelodeon decided to carve itself a piece of the Saturday morning cartoon pie by developing a system where personal vision held sway over expediency.

The concept was called Nicktoons, a 90 minute cartoon block intended to win Nickelodeon some of those lucrative, Saturday

#### NURSE STIMPY

An all-out first season gross-fest of epic proportions, as the disease-ridden Ren (l) is placed in the care of his bumbling pal, Stimpy, who promises to "ease his wretched suffering, even until all hope is gone." Right: Stimpy gets up close and personal with Ren's glands (dancing in top hats, it seems they were expecting company).



## EPISODE GUIDE

Consider this for a second: the original STAR TREK didn't truly find its fandom until NBC had cancelled it and the episodes were stripped for syndication. Once shows started airing daily, it wasn't long before viewing turned into ritual, with acolytes able to identify the 70-odd episodes within the first few seconds. Now, consider the REN & STIMPY SHOW. For its first season, only six episodes were produced. Thirteen episodes were ordered for its second season. Is it any wonder that, while the STAR TREK phenomenon took years to hit critical mass, REN & STIMPY fandom exploded in mere months? Call it the STAR TREK Accelerated Familiarity Factor (or S.T.A.F.F. for short), a trend that should start drawing the attention of savvy sociologists any day now (think of the funding potentials!).

The number of REN & STIMPY shows is hard to calculate since individual segments were initially mixed-and-matched in various configurations. What appears below is a comprehensive listing of all REN & STIMPY animation aired to date, plus a handful of episodes that have either gone unaired or unproduced due to the Nick/Spumco break. We've included quotes from the Spumco Big Shots, where applicable. There has yet to be a truly bad REN & STIMPY segment. The shows are rated:

- ★ Sorta okay.
- ★★ Good.
- ★★★ Really, really, trust-me-on-this-one, good.

In the first season, the only time footage from the pilot segment, "Big House Blues," was seen was during the opening credits (with one rare exception). It has aired several times during the second season, serving as stand-in for whatever segment failed to make it on the air.

The REN & STIMPY opening and closing themes were composed and performed by Der Screamin' Lederhosen, the coolest combo in cartooning.

Nick executive  
Vanessa Coffey.

Members include Spumco staffers Chris Reccardi on bass, Jim Smith on guitar, and Scott Huml on the bongos. Plans for the record have unfortunately been scrapped.

### Before the Beginning

"Go ahead, have fun. See if I care."  
—a suspiciously playful dog catcher to Ren and Stimpy, in a shot cut from the broadcast version.

**BIG HOUSE BLUES** ★★★  
12/90. Directed by John Kricfalusi.

After a brief intro of the duo—punctuated with a great static drawing of a feral Ren and Stimpy just about to rip each other's throats out—the two are scooped up by a dog catcher and carted off to the pound, a jolly place where the inmates party till dawn, then are marched off to the gas chamber for "The Big Sleep."

"Big House Blues" was the REN & STIMPY pilot. As Bob Camp noted, the effort devoted to it by the newly formed Spumco team fell somewhere between birth trauma and summer camp. "It was kinda fun. We were starving, because we didn't have very much money to make it, and the building we're in now, which we pretty much completely occupy, we just had one room in it at first, and then we got two rooms and then three rooms. It was four or five of us here, originally, doing that. It was fun because it was experimenting with new characters and

backgrounds, ways of doing stuff. It wasn't so much a job, it was a chance to go out on a limb and make some sort of artistic statement and try to do the best cartoon anybody's ever done. That's why it's so jam-packed with stuff. You've got to watch it four or five times to see everything—it's too much to absorb."

A careful viewing of the cartoon reveals much about the two characters that was still aborning at that point. "The way they're drawn has changed a lot," said Camp. "Ren's a lot less abstract and less insect-like, now. Those designs were based upon a few drawings, and when you design characters for animation simply by drawing them a lot, they become more comfortable to draw and they get more efficient, so they've gone through some changes. But I think all cartoon characters do that—look at Bugs Bunny or anybody—they change over the years, like it's natural."

"Originally [Stimpy] was just furniture. He was Ren's Haitian houseboy, or something. He sort of turned into an idiot savant, because he has all of these hidden talents. He's got the brain the size of raisin, but he's a genius inventor and an accomplished musician. But he doesn't know it—while he's playing the piano like Mozart, he's peeing on himself. He's a more well-rounded character, now."

Perhaps it was some of those rough edges that caused the executives at Nickelodeon to blink when it came to running this episode. It finally aired long after all the other shows had their go, and only after numerous shots were cut. Among the snipped material: a sequence in which the dog-catcher acts coy with our two heroes, another in which a dozing Ren engages in a little, nocturnal fantasizing with Stimpy (culminating in a big, sloppy kiss) and a third depicting Ren drinking out of a toilet. Strangely enough, some of the missing footage found its way into the montage cobbled up for the opening credits.

"Isn't that funny?" said Camp. "It's like, go figure. We didn't want to say, 'Oh, yeah? Well it's still in the opening title!' because then we thought they'd say, 'Oh, it is? Well, we'll cut it out of there, too.'"

### First Season

"You wanna make it in this world, you gotta adapt."

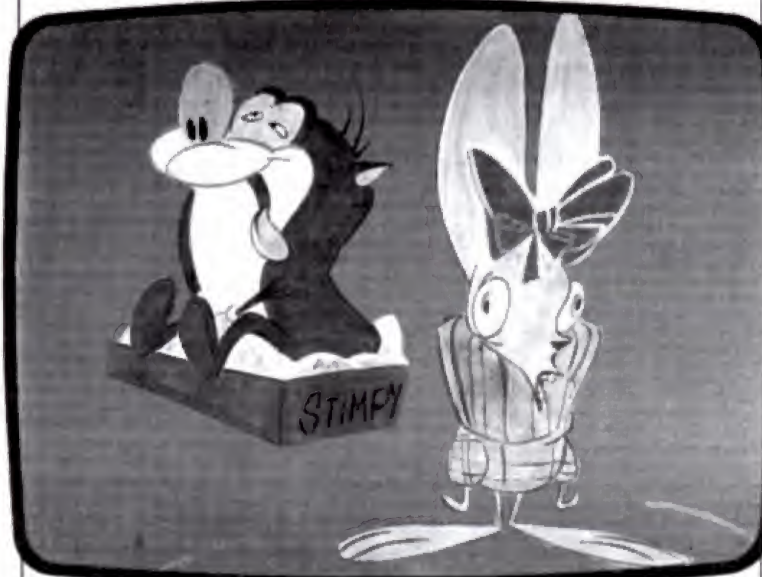
—Hollywood pragmatism meets Charles Darwin, via Muddy Mudskipper, in "Stimpy's Big Day"

**STIMPY'S BIG DAY** ★★★  
8/91. Directed by John Kricfalusi.

**THE BIG SHOT** ★★★  
8/91. Directed by John Kricfalusi.

The first, full REN & STIMPY show undertaken after the pilot. It's a half-hour "mini-movie" with individually titled segments about

Creator John Kricfalusi's development drawings of Ren & Stimpy, minor characters of another show, that caught the eye of Nick exec Vanessa Coffey.



Charlie the dog walks the final mile in "Big House Blues," the pilot for the series that Nickelodeon aired only after trimming controversial scenes.

Stimpy's ascension to the heights of Hollywood stardom as the result of winning a write-in contest. Features a non-sequitur walk-on by Kricfalusi idol Kirk Douglas, the first appearance of Mr. Horse—a recurring character with a passing resemblance to Kricfalusi himself (who also performs the voice)—and one of the series' classic lines as Ren tries to dissuade Stimpy from the notion that, by winning the contest, he will meet his TV idol, Muddy Mudskipper. "He's a cartoon!" the Chihuahua shouts, "Not flesh-and-blood, like we!"

This episode also contains an installment (the only installment, as it now stands) of "Stimpy's Breakfast Tips," themed to the surrounding story, and a closing "goodbye bumper" in which Ren consoles a distraught Stimpy—upset over not seeing his TV pals for another week—by handing him a big bag of cat litter (it's the simple things in life that are most precious). The show opens with the first of what will become a seemingly endless string of Log commercials using a striking knock-off of old Slinky ads to hype the thrill of owning a lifeless chunk of wood.

Bob Camp well remembered the development of this episode's atypical format. "There was so much we wanted to do with the story, we had trouble packing it into one 11-minute cartoon. It was actually easier to stretch it to two episodes than to compress it. Also, it was actually one less new cartoon to write. It saved us some time. "I think in comedy, short form is always the best—shorter is better."

"I do hereby promise only to watch THE REN & STIMPY SHOW, to make underleg noises during the good scenes, and to wear unwashed lederhosen every single day for the rest of my life."

—The Ren and Stimpy Oath ("Mommy, what's lederhosen?")

**STIMPY'S STORYBOOK LAND: ROBIN HOEK** ★  
8/91. Directed by John Kricfalusi.

**NURSE STIMPY** ★★  
8/91. Directed by "Raymond Spum."

A not-completely successful stab at Fractured Fairy Tale humor combines with the series first, major controversy to make this episode as interesting for what didn't turn up on-screen as what did. In Kricfalusi's "Robin Hoek," Stimpy tries to soothe himself to sleep by conjuring up his own version of the Robin Hood legend (while holding his fairy tale book upside-down). What he comes up with is a *Mad Libs* rendition of how the story, complete with brave Robin Hoek, using his bow to launch chickens, melons and moose instead of arrows, while "Maid Moron" (Stimpy in drag), is held prisoner by the evil Sheriff of Dodge City. Notable for a rundown of Merry Men that takes a sharp left turn into Dungeons-and-Dragons-land



# MARKET RESEARCH

Spumco's research team (right) meticulously measures the intensity of each joke, each sensory reaction, constantly refining and enhancing its entertainment product for the greater good of all. Shown below:

1) Ready to test some fresh new Spumco product. Leading today's experiment is the eminent Professor Yost, head of market research. Spumco has provided a healthy test subject, one medium-sized child.

2) The professor replays the last scene to check reactions in more detail. It may be too much enjoyment for the child. He begins to hyperventilate. His stinging brain begins to spit and sputter blobs of shuddering emotional energy into the overheated machine. As the dials burn white-hot, tearing open swollen blisters on the doctor's

delicate hands, Professor Yost keeps his stoic vigil.

3) The experiment is a resounding success. "Man's Best Friend" reached a new level of entertainment intensity that previously even Spumco had thought unattainable. And even more important—the subject survived. Professor Yost beams, the observational team heaves a sigh of relief as the child's breathing gradually returns to normal.

4) The discussions over, the doctors indulge in some good-natured horseplay at the little one's expense. At Spumco, even the scientists have to have a sense of humor.

5) The Spumco team looks in on the subject's condition.

6) Professor Yost gives us the sign—"It's a good cartoon," he says. □



Spumco artist Carey Yost experiments on office gofer Alonso Angel, a "lucky" neighborhood kid who promoted himself a job. Below: Spumco researchers (l to r), artists Charlie Bean, Vincent Waller and Eddie Fitzgerald, just following orders.



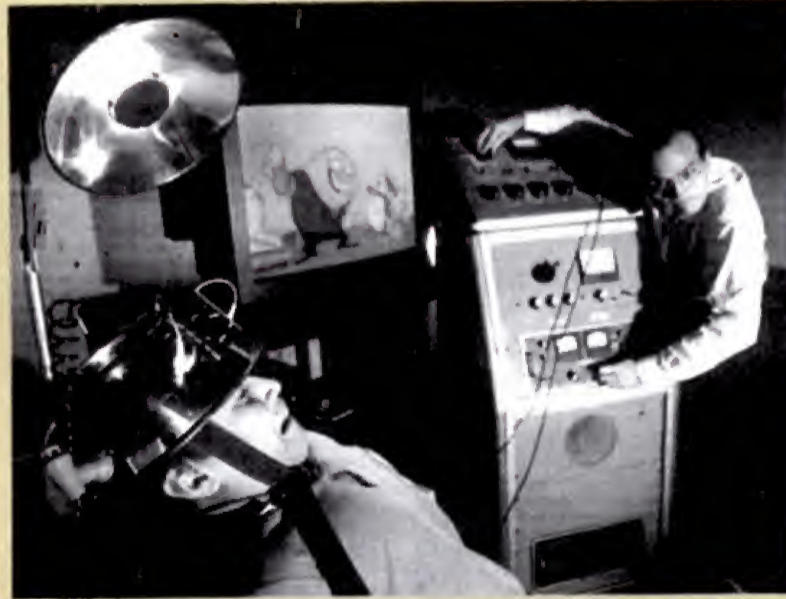
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**“Saturday morning all looks the same. We wanted to make some cartoons that were visually different and written different.”**

**- Nick exec Vanessa Coffey -**

morning advertising dollars. So that they wouldn't have to compete right off with the big boys, Nick positioned the block on Sunday mornings. So they could distinguish themselves from the rest of the network crowd—dominated by such animation factories as Dic, Marvel, and Hanna-Barbera—a unique philosophy for the block was developed. “The concept is that we wanted to make cartoons that were visually different from one another,” said Vanessa Coffey, vice president of animation for Nickelodeon, “and written differently, so it didn't look anything like Saturday morning, which all looks the same.”

Coffey is a TV animation veteran who listed past credits for work at Marvel Productions and Murakami Wolf Swenson. “What I wanted to do was get out of a factory environment,” said Coffey. “I had seen a lot of artists sitting around, very depressed and feeling like they were making cars instead of cartoons. I just thought that they were very creative and there was a lot of potential there that wasn't being utilized. So the goal was to take creators and have them creatively drive the project, from beginning to end, and be passionate about it.”

Coffey got the ball rolling by letting word circulate that she was looking for “animator's projects...characters that were in animator's/creator's closets.” Among those answering the call was John Kricfalusi. Now the head “Big Shot” (that's what the credits call him—he also directs, writes and produces) of Spumco. Kricfalusi had previously carved himself a unique (or, more accurately, notorious) niche in animation history.

**K**ricfalusi gained his first fame while working as director for Ralph Bakshi's critically praised (and fundamentalist reviled) **THE NEW ADVENTURES OF MIGHTY MOUSE** in 1987. After parting with his colleague over a money dispute, Kricfalusi signed on with Dic, where he and his crew were subsequently fired over an abortive revival of animator Bob Clampett's **BEANIE AND CECIL**. It was, said the director, an unpleasant experience for all involved. “I was trying to explain to the ABC executives exactly the system that we used

with such members as Ransack the Elder and Elkhorn the Downtrodden, the best Rapunzel gag ever committed to film, and a bedtime prayer prologue in which Ren reveals his heart's greatest desire, “Huge pectoral muscles.”

An all-out gross-fest of epic proportions, “Nurse Stimpy” places a disease-ridden Ren in the care of his pal, Stimpy, who promptly promises to “ease his wretched suffering, even until all hope is gone.” In rapid succession, Stimpy gets up-close and personal with Ren's glands (seems they were expecting company: they come out in top hats and ties), subjects Ren to daily spleen flensings, and forces repeated doses of “icky tasting” medicine down his throat. Good montage here of Stimpy the dedicated nurse going nuts from the strain. Paging Dr. Giggles.

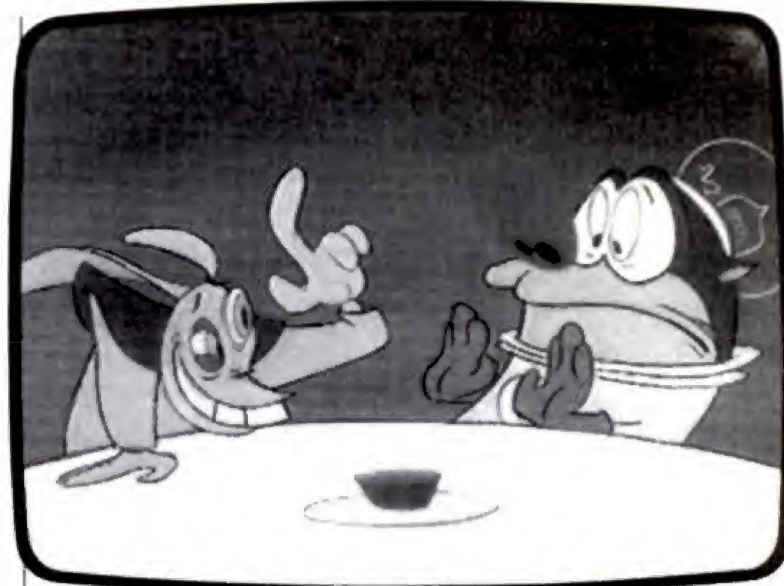
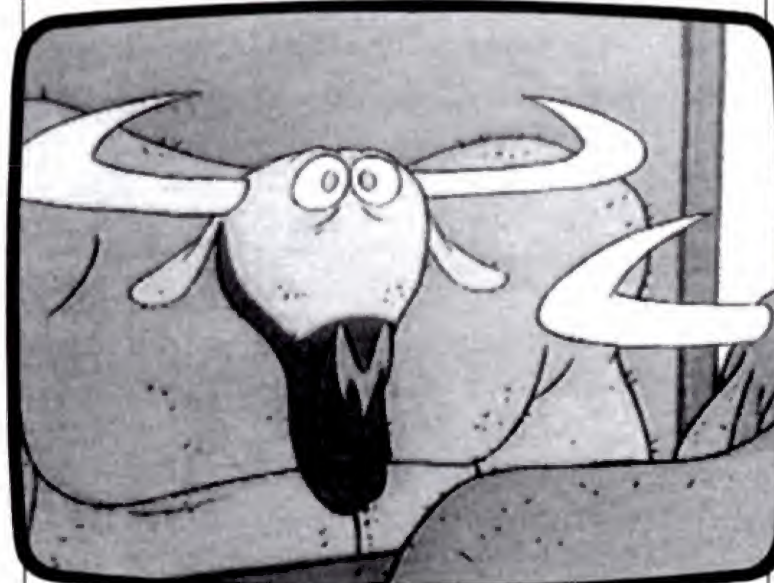
The show opens with superhero Powdered Toast Man delivering an emergency shipment of Ren and Stimpy's favorite breakfast food right to their table—a clever satire of '50s-style, product tie-in ads. Midway through, Ren forces the audience to take the Ren and Stimpy Oath before permitting Stimpy to show a “secret cartoon.” The half-hour ends in infamy, as Stimpy shows off his “magic nose goblins” during the goodbye bumper.

“Robin Hoek” doesn't stand out as one of Kricfalusi's favorite episodes. Not that the cartoon didn't have its moments. “There were a couple of experiments in it that I thought worked really well,” the director said. “That long sequence of Stimpy running towards the castle to change into his Maid Moron outfit—that was a real experiment. When everybody saw that on the Moviola, and there was this long, long, long footage of him just running, running, running, everybody thought I was crazy. They said, ‘This is too long. There's nothing going on here.’ And I said, ‘No, people are going to laugh because it's taking him so long to get to this castle, because it's such a long run. But you won't believe this until I do the sound effects and the music.’ And when I did the sound effects and the music, it worked. It surprised me as much as anybody else—I mean, I bluffed everybody. I was *praying* that it would work.”

“Nurse Stimpy” is presented as the alleged “secret cartoon,” a status that all involved likely wished were true. Actually directed by Kricfalusi, he opted for a pseudonymous credit out of a sense that the finished product was far below standards. “The timing was bad. The drawings are bad. The colors are bad. From an artistic standpoint, to me, it's a really ugly cartoon.”

Nickelodeon's excision of some of the more explicit gags didn't help. “The grossest stuff isn't in it,” explained Camp. “All the gross stuff got cut out. We had some cool stuff in there.” Amongst the shorn material, according to Camp, was a scene where Stimpy decides Ren needs a blood test. “He says, ‘I'm gonna call in a professional.’ He calls a doctor. He's waiting outside, and the doctor shows up, and it's a six-foot leech wearing a hat and carrying a doctor's bag. Stimpy says, ‘He's

“Yak Shaving Day,” a commercial for a made-up holiday guaranteed to confuse impressionable young viewers, capping “The Boy Who Cried Rat.”



**A clever ploy from “Space Madness,” Commander Hoek orders Cadet Stimpy never to press the dreaded “history eraser button.”**

right in there, Doctor.’ Doctor says, ‘Don't worry. Leave everything to me. I'm a professional.’

“He goes in, checks Ren out, listens to him, and says, ‘Hmm...Why don't you just lay back and think of something pleasant?’ And Ren takes a big sigh and leans back and thinks of big fields of poppies, butterflies; he hears beautiful music, lyrical music. And the leech crawls on top of Ren and lays on top of him and sucks all the blood and life out of him until he's just a husk. And he gets up and says, ‘If you're not feeling any better, call me in the morning.’ He walks out and tells Stimpy, ‘Just keep an eye on him, and let me know if there's any change.’ And Stimpy goes, ‘Well, you're the leech!’ That got cut out.”

**“They think I'm crazy, but I know better. It is not I who am crazy, it is I who am mad!”**

**—Commander Hoek, justifying his suspicions of a vast, cosmic conspiracy in “Space Madness.”**

**SPACE MADNESS** ★★★

9/91. Directed by John Kricfalusi.

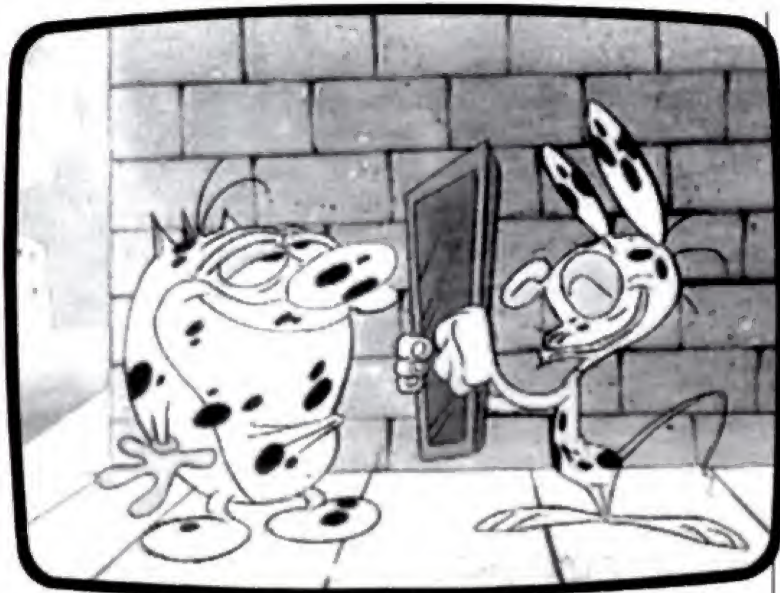
**THE BOY WHO CRIED RAT** ★★★

9/91. Directed by John Kricfalusi.

If there's any such thing as the perfect **REN & STIMPY SHOW**, this may be it. Kricfalusi's “Space Madness” is the premiere episode of the Commander Hoek and Stimpy series, a neat satire of Captain Video-style space operas. Ren, who usually walks the borderlines of sanity in any case, here goes completely over the edge, pushed to extremes by the prospect of a 36-year space flight in the company of Cadet Stimpy. Features lots of great, Fred C. Dobbsian rantings as Ren becomes convinced that his faithful sidekick is out to get him.

“The Boy Who Cried Rat” takes a common premise—two connivers are undone by their own scam—and pushes it to limits rarely dreamed of outside of psychiatric wards. In this case, Ren and Stimpy conspire to bilk a proto-'50s, suburbanite couple out of cash and comestibles by posing as wily mouse (Ren in Mickey Mouse ears screaming, “Squeak! Squeak! Squeak, I tell you!”) and seasoned rodent catcher (Stimpy, dropping such Hanna-Barberisms as, “You are in trouble now, Mr. Rodent!”). Things work fine until one of the humans suggest that Stimpy actually *eat* his catch. The first half of the episode manages to take jabs at everything from dawn-of-television sitcoms to the history of animation. The second half lingers with sadistic glee on the sight of Stimpy trying to stay in character while chewing up his friend. Lots of good, long shots of Ren suffering drownings, pummelings, and severe mastications (we also get a close look at the composition of Stimpy's teeth, as grim a panorama as you're ever likely to see)—Kricfalusi credits Vincent Waller's storyboard with a good deal of this episode's impact.

After the fade-out, Ren reappears. “Hey, kids!”



Starving once again, Ren & Stimpy disguise themselves to get hired as "Fire Dogs." Only ninety-nine more and we'd have a movie!

he says, "There's only five more days till Yak Shaving Day." Yes, it's a commercial for Ren and Stimpy's own, made up holiday, complete with such mock traditions as stapling dirty diapers to the living room wall. Guaranteed to confuse impressionable, young viewers for days. This bumper is so good, it deserves its own rating: (★★★).

As for "Boy Who Cried Rat," Camp noted that its simple premise was born of an even simpler desire. "We just wanted to do a cartoon where Stimpy chews Ren up, so we sort of built a cartoon around it. In fact, we wrote a sequel to that [second season] that we didn't use because originally we were going to do 20 episodes; we cut it down to 13 because there was no way we could do it. We wrote 'Cried Rat II,' and the way it started was pretty funny. The cartoon starts and you see Ren and Stimpy standing there. And Ren slowly looks up and realizes the cartoon's begun and goes, 'Oh...' and opens Stimpy's mouth and gets in, and Stimpy begins chewing him up. It's completely gratuitous. None of this false pretense of story or plot or set-up. By God, what we want is the meat of the thing, which is being chewed up! That's all people remember, anyway."

About the insidious closing bumper, Camp intimated that things could have been much worse. "We were trying to get Nickelodeon to do a Yak Shaving Day special, but the way we wanted to advertise it was like it was a real thing—not even talk about Ren and Stimpy, just talk about Yak Shaving Day. Have other characters mention it, like on their live-action stuff. Get their advertisers to go, 'Only 12 more shopping days till Yak Shaving Day.'"

The idea was evidently nixed. Whether this is a bad thing is, perhaps, a matter of opinion.

**"Oh, woe is I,  
The well has gone dry.  
And my cow will just give powdered milk.**

**I tell you no lie,  
My sow, she does fry.  
And my chickens can only lay silt."**  
—Wee Ren's lament,  
from "The Littlest Giant."

### STIMPY'S STORYBOOK LAND: THE LITTLEST GIANT

9/91. Director uncredited.

Run with the pilot, "Big House Blues," this is probably the least successful of all Ren and Stimpy episodes. Abandoning its *Mad Libs* gimmick early on, the cartoon lingers too long on static sequences of Stimpy, as the title character, being persecuted by his peer group. Eventually, he sets out for Thumbsville, where he saves drought-bound Wee Ren ("of the Wee folk") with his large sobbing. The episode is capped off with a sound effect

fadeout that can only be deciphered if you've seen the previous "Robin Hoek."

Also contains an ad for Log for Girls (the same hunk of wood with a shock of blonde hair tacked on top), a segment of "Ask Dr. Stupid" in which Stimpy reveals the true reason parents send their kids to school (it's worse than you ever imagined), and a goodbye bumper in which Ren convinces Stimpy to chase his (non-existent) tail.

Kricfalusi was so dissatisfied with "The Littlest Giant" that he now refers to it as, "The Littlest Jokes." Said Camp, "Something we discovered and the reason we quit making those, is that narrating a story slows it down to a snail's pace. You have to wait for the guy to say what's going to happen before it happens. They can't all be winners. If that's the worst one, we're doing pretty good. Plus, I wrote it...buddy!"

### FIRE DOGS

★★

9/91. Directed by John Kricfalusi.

Yearning for conventional? This episode's the one for you (though, of course, the definition of "conventional" is always up for grabs). In Kricfalusi's "Fire Dogs," which ran with a repeat of an earlier first season show, a (once again) starving Ren and Stimpy douse themselves with Dalmatian paint and hire themselves out as fire dogs to a slightly bent brigade chief (he has this thing about circus midgets, you see...). The bulk of this cartoon is taken up with Ren and Stimpy battling a high-rise blaze while a "horizontally challenged" matron hoists any number of outlandish creatures out of the window of her penthouse. Features the reappearance of Mr. Horse (in a nice, though painful, bit of animation), more falling gags than Tex Avery could shake a drafting pencil at, and an ending in which Ren and Stimpy come out victorious for once—though only briefly.

"It's a regular cartoon," said Camp. "Lots of mayhem and running around and physical humor. It's not the usual, bizarre fare. We realized that we gotta do a regular cartoon in here. John wrote that one overnight, he wrote that one all by himself. Chris Reccardi boarded it real quick."

**"We must preserve nature's delicate balance, for without creatures such as the Frilled Ren, there would be no nature show hosts."**

—Marlon Hoek, expounding upon the hard realities of self-preservation in the video jungle.

### MAROONED

★★

12/91. Directed by John Kricfalusi.

### UNTAMED WORLD

★★★

12/91. Directed by John Kricfalusi.

Commander Hoek and Cadet Stimpy finally continued on page 34

Wee Ren of Thumbsville shows his gratitude to Giant Stimpy for saving the day by plucking out his eyebrows in "The Littlest Giant," a *Mad* parody.



**"Then the contract came and I realized they wanted to own the copyright. I fought like crazy to keep it, but they wouldn't do it."**

— Creator John Kricfalusi —

on REN & STIMPY, and it was too radical for them. We wanted to do the cartoons the way Bob Clampett did the cartoons, and that was to write outlines and then do a storyboard, which the storyboard artist would flesh out. The Clampetts were willing to go with that, if I remember correctly, because Sody [Bob Clampett's widow] worked on the original BEANIE AND CECILS with Bob and she knew that the system works. That's how all the great cartoons are made. But I was in the position of having to educate everybody who didn't know anything about the history of animation.

"ABC hired their own story editor, who had no loyalty to us, no loyalty to the Clampetts, no loyalty to the history of animation, didn't like the artists, and proceeded to write the worst scripts in history. We were stuck with them. As a compromise, I said, 'You've got to at least let us draw these funny.' We had no control over anything."

Unfortunately, having artists exhibit their creativity on the drawing board was too much for ABC executives accustomed to having every story element locked down at the scripting stage. The plug was pulled on BEANIE AND CECIL within weeks of its debut, and Kricfalusi was handed his walking papers. Finding himself "at liberty" once again, he got in touch with Coffey during one of her swings through L.A., and arranged a meeting. He pitched five different concepts, things with titles like HE-HOG THE ATOMIC PIG, THE PREDATOR, JIMMY'S CLUBHOUSE (featuring one of Kricfalusi's older creations, Jimmy the Hapless Boy), and an Our Gang take-off, called YOUR GANG. It was during the pitch for the latter that Kricfalusi showed Coffey sketches for a dog and cat, initially meant to be pets for one of the project's main characters. "The minute I saw it," recalled Coffey, "I started laughing. And I said, 'What is this?'"

"This" was the embryonic design of Ren and Stimpy and the drawing was enough to win Kricfalusi a flight to New York, and a chance to pitch his ideas to the Nickelodeon brass. Generally speaking, pitch sessions can be many things, ranging from a relaxed meeting of minds to mini inquisitions. In Kricfalusi's case, the presentation



Fracturing the fairy tales, Ren & Stimpy make merry in "Robin Hoek." Above: Robin courts Maid Moron, confusing the legend with Rapunzel.



came closer to a three-ring circus. "He's pretty reserved and quiet, normally," said Bob Camp, one of the founding Spumco Big Shots and writer, artist, and director on numerous REN & STIMPY episodes, "but when he's pitching a storyboard, he thrusts his groin out and grits his teeth and falls on the floor and writhes around and slams his head into a door. It's pretty shocking if you're not ready for it."

Coffey was a first hand witness. "He threw himself all over the room. His Certs flew into the president's lap—Gerry Laybourne—as he was throwing himself around. That was convincing enough for her. She said, "We have to work with him." (Kricfalusi pointed out that it was actually an asthma inhaler that landed in Laybourne's lap—he conceded, though, that things may have been so intense that

few were likely to notice the difference.)

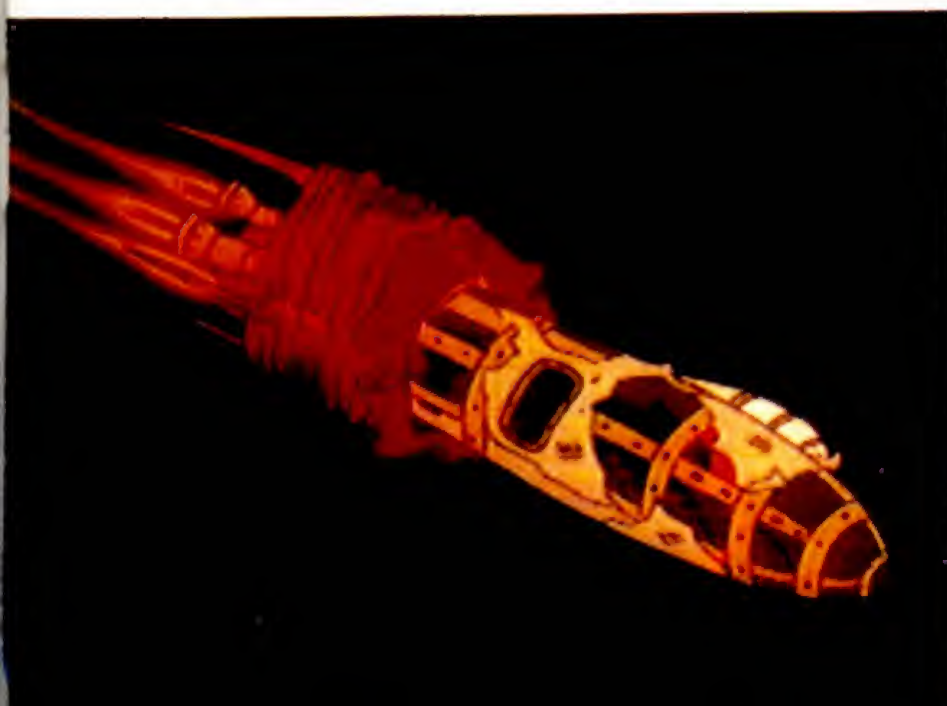
Added Camp, "He's scared any number of network executives, film people, with his contortions. They think he's a madman. He's a pretty weird guy when it comes to that, but he's really funny. He's one of the best pitchmen I've ever seen...I've seen him rip his shirt off, buttons flying across the room, pitching a board. And spit, it's like a shower of spit."

**T**he meeting hit pay dirt. "Vanessa called me back a few days later, after I went back to L.A.," said Kricfalusi. "We were all sweating—[Spumco partners] Jim [Smith], Bob [Camp] and Lynne [Naylor] and I, all waiting, wondering what was going to happen, not really believing that they would buy anything. And then Vanessa called up and

said, 'We want to buy two pilots from you.' They weren't buying series right away. They wanted to test pilots, so they were giving people enough money to produce a pilot. The two pilots they wanted to do were REN & STIMPY and JIMMY, the one that I acted out. I acted out a Jimmy story completely, with no drawings. I memorized a story on the plane and acted it out for Gerry. They loved JIMMY. They went completely crazy.

"So I was all ready. 'All right, let's do two pilots! This is great!' And then the contract came, and I realized that they wanted to own the copyright. I fought like crazy to keep the copyright and they just wouldn't do it. They refused. So when I knew I had to give up the rights, I said, 'All right, well, take my second best charac-

continued on page 34



**MAROONED**, the boys finally make it to a planet in the second of the Commander Hoek and Stimpy adventures. Left: The ship in crash mode. Near Left: Surveying their new world, the survivors call upon the latest in futuristic equipment, guided by the rather dubious advice of Stimpy's Space Cadet Manual. Science fiction clichés at their weirdest.



## FUTURE PROJECTS

*For John Kricfalusi's Hollywood cartoon studio there's life after Ren & Stimpy.*

By Dan Persons

If the REN & STIMPY debacle has added a few more notches to animation director John Kricfalusi's notoriety, the quality of the show has won his Spumco animation studio the attention of distributors and networks. Presiding over an animation facility that is kept going with the labor of a skeleton staff, Kricfalusi has several new projects off the ground. He's had numerous concepts to pitch. While Nickelodeon has retained the rights to the REN & STIMPY universe, they've pointedly relinquished back to its creator the character of George Liquor, star of "Man's Best Friend" and "Dog Show."

"They really don't like the character of George Liquor," said Spumco artist Eddie Fitzgerald. "They gave it back to John. John owns George Liquor. Boy, did they make a mistake! Because if you team George Liquor with the right person, it's just about the funniest thing that happens. He's drawn much better now and he wasn't really used before, so he was just a background figure. He's evolved a whole lot since then, so a lot of people may not recognize the older character as being the same guy. You have to see him in his new incarnation. It's like looking at Bogart in his early movies where they didn't give him a starring role and he just stood in the background. You should see him as



Kricfalusi's model sketch of Jean Poole, the lovely and resourceful heroine of *THE RIPPING FRIENDS*, a science fiction epic.

a star."

"They hated him that badly," said Kricfalusi, "that they threw away \$100 million and then gave me all this great publicity about him. I get so many letters from people, *begging* me, "Ohhh, show us George Liquor! We want to see the stuff that's too wild for Nickelodeon!"

Audiences may eventually get their chance. Some possible projects for Spumco include a series of short subjects featuring George Liquor and Jimmy the Hapless Boy—the concept

that Nickelodeon originally wanted to buy and that Kricfalusi refused to sell. "He's a lot funnier character," said Kricfalusi of his refusal to sell Jimmy to Nickelodeon. "It was like keeping Bugs Bunny and selling Porky Pig. Porky Pig is a funny character, but Bugs Bunny...when you think of Warner Bros, you think of Bugs Bunny. And when you think Spumco, people are going to think of Jimmy."

Despite their being fired by Nickelodeon from REN & STIMPY, Spumco Big Shots seem perched on a rebirth that might carry their next projects into movie theatres across the land.

"I've been talking to a few studios," said Kricfalusi. "I could probably sell a television series without too much trouble, because I've done a television series that was a hit, made somebody hundreds of millions of dollars, so everybody knows that I'm good at that medium. But ideally, if this is possible, what I'd really like to do is shorts. Do shorts that appear before motion pictures. The best medium anywhere for animation is theatrical shorts: full animation, do it in front of a big audience, on a huge screen, and exploit the medium to its fullest. That's how Bugs Bunny and all the great stuff was done, and that's the way I'd do it. I'd like to bring that back.

"At first I thought that would be a really hard sell, because there isn't any market



Kricfalusi's JIMMY, THE HAPLESS BOY, re-

going on. It isn't a market now, even though people have tried here and there. ROGER RABBIT was pretty successful. People seemed to love it at the theatres. But they haven't really followed through on it. But, anyway, I'm getting interest in it. People are interested in doing it. So I'm kind of surprised and pretty hopeful about it. I think it's going to come back."

If Kricfalusi can find the financing, he'll likely also find staff laid off by Nickelodeon more than willing to return. Some have even stated that they'd re-enlist with Spumco even if it meant taking a pay cut—no small act in a town where everything has its price.

Fitzgerald was able to spell it out, "Probably once in a while John is a little obstinate,

Wardrobing *THE RIPPING FRIENDS*.







Reportedly a concept that Nickelodeon wanted to buy but Kricfalusi refused to sell outright.

but put it this way: if he wasn't obstinate, if he wasn't the type of person who was like that, how could he have ever survived for ten years hitting his head against a brick wall where no one wanted to hear his ideas, none of the existing studios wanted to hire him for anything that required thinking? He just had doors slammed in his face for ten years and was living at a standard that was far below what he was capable of getting. Only someone who was really stubborn could have survived that and come out creative. John's not bitter at all, he's just oriented towards the future.

"He has to cut a deal that allows him to go slow in the beginning so that he can train people, because there's not that many people in the industry

who've been trained to do comedic acting and comedic drawing. The Bluth and Disney style, you have to be good to do that, but unfortunately a lot of people who can animate can't draw funny, and a lot of people who can draw funny can't animate. So John has to create a new breed of artist who can do that.

"John is trying to push animation in a completely new direction. That is a real hard thing to do. It means that you not only have to come up with the new ideas, but you have to train people to do them. And it's new on every level: the way things are painted is new, the direction technique is new, the drawing style is new, the acting is something that artists are not familiar with. He wants to put

genuine acting in the cartoons—comedic acting, the kind of thing that Ralph Kramden did, or Jerry Lewis, or W.C. Fields. And he wants to avoid clichés and never repeat himself. It is so ambitious, and he was *succeeding!* It's not just a dream, it actually *happened*—look at "Space Madness" and "Stimpy's Invention"! There's nothing else in the media that's like it."

If all works out, Spumco will be set to embark on a feature-length production that promises to tie together all of Kricfalusi's passions—from his zeal for innovative animation and raucous, Earth-shattering action to his love of the intense acting style of Kirk Douglas—into one mammoth, ultra-manly package: **THE RIPPING FRIENDS**, described by Fitzgerald as, "a bunch of weird super-heroes who try to make the world safe for manliness. They can rip their way through time, they can rip their way through anything that can be ripped, in their quest for manliness. The inspiration is Kirk Douglas in **DETECTIVE STORY**, all the poses that he made." No less a manic producer than Joel Silver (**DIE HARD**, **THE LAST BOY SCOUT**) has expressed interest in the project and, though the budget hasn't been worked out, a rough estimate places the price for the film at an ambitious \$25 million.

"I want to do some experimental stuff in it," said Kricfalusi. "I want to do some computer animation in the back-



HE-HOG, THE ATOMIC PIG, one of the ideas Kricfalusi's Spumco pitched at Nick.

grounds—not in the traditional computer animation style that everybody's used to. I want it to look a little bit like the old Fleischer Superman cartoons, but I want to be able to move the camera in. I'm going to use it to its graphic fullest—it will match the style of whatever we decide and hopefully expand the type of styles we can do.

Kricfalusi's sketches for the proposed project are both impressive and hilarious. "THE RIPPING FRIENDS is our first epic, animated feature," said Kricfalusi. "It's like George Liquor meets THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. It's the biggest, most manly cartoon ever."

But, then, one now expects nothing less of Kricfalusi. □

Left: Space outfit; Center: G. I. Rip; Right: The hero in his BVDs. Kricfalusi is talking to movie producer Joel Silver about the possibility of a big-budget feature.





A little tagging incident plagues our hosts in "Untamed World," Kricfalusi's nature show parody of Marlon Perkins and Jim Fowler.

make it to a planet in Kricfalusi's "Marooned," not that it does them much good. After a spectacular crash sequence, the two spend the rest of the cartoon struggling for survival on an uncharted world, their sole aid the rather dubious advice of Stimpy's Space Cadet Manual (the poor cat still hasn't latched onto the concept of books—here he tries to eat the blamed thing). Space adventure at its weirdest, with carnivorous cabbages, five-eyed frogs and a hungry shape shifter who lures Ren with an image pulled from the darkest of his nocturnal fantasies: a slinky, photo-realistic female Chihuahua in a clinging gown.

Ren and Stimpy go for full-tilt satire in Kricfalusi's "Untamed World," a segment that manages simultaneously to be a sharp take off of all those WILD KINGDOM-style nature shows, while again indulging Kricfalusi and Co.'s fondness for evolutionary humor. With Ren filling the shoes of Marlon Perkins and Stimpy as his Jim Fowler, the two travel to the Galapagos Islands, where many of the species bear a suspicious resemblance to a certain duo. Here's nature in all its raw, untamed splendor: seagulls who bum loose change off baby turtles, nocturnal lizards with tongues that slap flies silly before ingestion and mammoth "crocostimpies," who bellow their mating call "Happy, happy, joy, joy!" before grabbing a lunchbox, boarding a bus and tootling off to work with their fellow amphibians.

This episode also has an ad for My Little Brother, a doll girls can blame for all the mischief they get themselves into (pull the string and it says "I did it"), an installment of "Ask Dr. Stupid," in which Stimpy explains why some camels have one hump while others have two (the answer flummoxes even him), and a goodbye bumper with Stimpy and his pet crocostimpy.

"'Marooned' had great ideas," said Kricfalusi, "but the execution fell short, the timing was horrible. We freelanced the timing on that one and it was just way too slow... We just rushed through it, and so you see a lot of really bad mistakes. You see the aliens at the end, the giant brain guys. They're on overlays, but we were rushing through it so fast that you can see the tear lines around them—they're on cut-out pieces of paper glued to cels. It looks awful."

Said Camp about "Untamed World," "Satire is one of the most overused, most tired forms of humor. Everybody read *Mad* magazine and everybody knows the Dick DeBartolo system of satire and everybody knows how to make fun of TV shows. Everybody's seen it a million times."

Added Kricfalusi, "Jim Smith [whose layout work Kricfalusi credits for the episode's success] and I are nature show fans. He and I used to sit in my house all the time and watch nature shows and laugh at God's creations. We think God is the greatest comedian in the world for some of the things He's come up with, stuff that cartoonists could never think of. So finally, we got our chance with Ren and Stimpy—I pitched the idea of doing

that story and they thought it was pretty weird at Nickelodeon, but I talked them into it.

"I originally wanted to do this story four or five years ago when I was first sitting down with the Clampetts. They'd hired me to help them develop THE BEANIE AND CECIL SHOW for ABC. They originally wanted me to be just an artist, because they thought my stories were too wild, too way out. I suggested one story to them where Beanie and Cecil visit the Galapagos Islands and there they see different versions of themselves... They thought I was crazy. They didn't want me to write anymore, after that."

One gag—that of the crocostimpy with the "Happy, happy, joy, joy" mating call—wound up the non-sequitur it is because a key element had to be excised. "The joke went through a few changes and something got lost," Camp said. "Originally, when the crocostimpy first sits up—and this was based on the pilot, but no one's ever seen the pilot, so we couldn't use the line—he says, 'What's the Big Sleep, Ren?' And as the bus drives away, you see dozens of female crocostimpies chasing the bus, going, 'He's dead, you idiot! Do you know what dead is?' But since no one saw the pilot, no one would have got that. So we took it out and it ended up just being weird."

This episode, like many of the preceding, ends with a goodbye bumper. And, like many of the preceding goodbye bumpers (the "nose goblins" bumper being the debatable exception), it isn't an especially big laugh. That, said Kricfalusi, is easy to explain. "We kept sending [Nickelodeon] bumpers that we thought were hilarious, like the nose goblins one. They hated the nose goblins one, so they said, 'All right, we're gonna write some now,' and they sent them to us. One of the ones they sent was the one with 'You could chase your tail till you're dizzy.' And then Stimpy chases it."

Added Camp, "We didn't want to do those in the first place, but Nickelodeon wanted them. So, we did a few of them and as soon as they quit making us do them, we quit doing them. They're okay, but what's the point? Just end the cartoon and get the hell out."

**"The little critters of nature, they don't know that they're ugly. That's very funny, a fly marrying a bumble-bee. I told you I'd shoot, but you didn't believe me. Why didn't you believe me?"**

—Stinky Wizzleteats' not-at-all incoherent exhortation for more merriment, from "Stimpy's Invention"

#### BLACK HOLE ★★

2/92. Director uncredited.

#### STIMPY'S INVENTION ★★★

2/92. Directed by John Kricfalusi.

When this episode made its debut in early

Reacting to instructions from the ship's computer in "Black Hole," the third and last installment of the adventures of Commander Hoek and Stimpy.



**“I used to eat weird things and come home and throw up all over my plate. My dad told me I did it on purpose and whipped me.”**

— Kricfalusi on childhood —

ters,' and I kept Jimmy."

Money was assigned for a pilot and with capital now in the bank, Kricfalusi formed Spumco with his associates Bob Camp, Jim Smith and Lynne Naylor. Work on the pilot began in the summer of '89 and continued for eight months. What the team came up with was "Big House Blues," a nine-minute short about Ren and Stimpy's sojourn in a dog pound. It was a film that became the prototype not only for the look of the series, but for its entire world view. From the first frame featuring the impoverished, near-starving duo huddling in a rain storm, to the last, in which the two are rescued from an appointment with the gas chamber by the gol-durndest, cutest li'l girl you ever did see (who just so happens to mistake Ren for a toy poodle after Stimpy has barfed hairballs all over him), this was the sort of edgy, messy humor few expected in prime time, much less on a kid's show. Echoing Nickelodeon's desire that the cartoon have a more personal feel to it, the episode featured such unusual touches as the use of hand-inked cels (as opposed to the now-customary photocopying), and the participation of Kricfalusi as the voice of the mercurial, Teutonic-accented Ren. ("We wanted Peter Lorre," said Camp, "but he was dead.")

Some of that edginess was too much for the folks at the network. "We had one of the characters dying," said Coffey of a bit of plotting that failed to make it past the storyboard. "Well, coming back in the end, sort of popping up out of the grave. We didn't want that to be part of it. The problem was this was for testing purposes, and we wanted to make sure that kids didn't get upset at all. We were just extra careful. Now we probably wouldn't think twice about doing something like that."

"It is in the cartoon," Kricfalusi replied. "Phil the Dog gets walked down to be put to sleep—he does die. The part that didn't make it into the cartoon was the end, where Phil popped up out of the grave to prove he was alive. I put that ending into the cartoon to sell killing him in the first place, because when they first saw him being walked down to the gas chamber, they said, 'No,



## THIS IS YOUR LIFE, JOHN KRICFALUSI

*The roots of cartoon genius, from overdosing on Hanna-Barbera to idolizing animation great Bob Clampett.*

By Dan Persons

So, what type of person does it take to set television animation on its ear? How about one born into a military household, who spent the first half of his Wonder Years growing up in the heart of Europe, and the latter half back home, gorging on the output of Hanna-Barbera? How about one capable of netting honors grades, who still wound up being thrown out of Canada's most prestigious animation school? How about one who early-on embraced as a guiding light the most radical and inventive of all the Looney Tune auteurs and, in trying to adapt his mentor's methods to the bottom-line atmosphere of modern animation, managed to delight fans even as he was driving corporate-types straight up the wall? This is the career path taken by John Kricfalusi, founder of REN & STIMPY production company Spumco. Beaver Cleaver need not apply.

Born of Canadian parents, Kricfalusi would actually live out half his childhood before seeing home. "My dad was in the Air Force when I was young," he explained, "so we were in Europe. I was running around with *lederhosen* on and riding goats. I ate a lot of sausages, yodeled, played the bagpipes—spoke German when I was a little kid. I remember running around in Belgium with a Sputnik toy attached to a long wire. It actually flew and had a remote control. That says it all: *lederhosen* and the future."

Doesn't quite sound like the Heidi lifestyle—an impression that Kricfalusi is quick to affirm. "I used to eat weird things and then throw up. I'd eat stuff that I'd find on trees—they didn't know what it was—and then come home and puke it all up all



A young Kricfalusi poses with legendary Warner Bros cartoonist Bob Clampett.

over my plate. My dad would tell me I did that on purpose and then whip me. This background material may explain what you see on our cartoons [laughs]...I think my Dad's a nice guy, he's just like a dad.

"I used to go to the movies every weekend, on the Air Force base, from when I was about two or three years old until I was about seven. Every weekend I'd go to the movies and see these weird cartoons, European feature-length cartoons like *THE SNOW QUEEN*."

This idyllic existence was cut short at seven, when a return to Canada led to a case of culture shock. "It really twisted me," said Kricfalusi. "We went to Montreal for one year. Soon as I got used to it, we moved to Ottawa. I lived with my grandparents for a couple of months which was really bizarre. I wasn't going to school, because we were moving and it was in the middle of the school season. So I got to sit there and watch cartoons every day—all I did. I drew cartoons, I watched them. That's when I discovered *HUCKLEBERRY HOUND*, *YOGI BEAR*, *QUICK*

*DRAW MCGRAW* and *BEANIE AND CECIL*. That's when I got my Huckleberry Hound bowl and my Yogi Bear cup, which I refused to eat breakfast without. "By the time I got back to school, I was never the same."

School itself presented its own difficulties. "I couldn't get used to wearing long pants; it was really weird. I used to love that feeling of the inside of leather [*lederhosen*] scraping against my naked. Never got that again.

"That year, when I got back to school, I got the strap twice, but also won a prize for being the first in class. I won a Golden Book called "The Way to the Stars," and then, after winning that, a couple of kids beat me up after I got off the bus. And that was the day Kennedy got shot, too—that really pissed me off, because they didn't run the cartoons."

With the onset of adolescence, things began to spiral out-of-control. "In 1966, for Christmas, I got a paisley shirt and some mod pants, and that was it, that ruined me. Then I stopped slicking my hair back, combed it down—I was a mod. I went out and got pointy boots with chains all over them, for grade six. Then I was just corrupt forever."

Somehow, Kricfalusi was able to suspend the corruption long enough to win himself a slot at Sheridan College, Canada's most prestigious animation school. But if getting in was one thing, staying in was another. "I was bored, I didn't like it. I never went to class. I was partying too much; I was out watching cartoons. I just don't fit in any kind of structured establishment. Soon as somebody tells me, 'This is the way things are,' I instantly go in the opposite direction and it pisses people off.

I love to prove people wrong.”

One of the few things that college life did do for Kricfalusi was to bring him into contact with the work of Bob Clampett, the Looney Tunes director whose fevered *mise en scenes* would have a dramatic effect on the younger artist's view of animation. “In Toronto, there was a guy, Reg Hart, who ran old films and old cartoons every Sunday at a college in Toronto. I discovered the Tex Avery cartoons from MGM, which I hadn't seen much of. I really liked those, and I started to think, ‘Hey, Tex Avery's my favorite director.’ But then, I saw [Clampett's] ‘The Great Piggy Bank Robbery,’ and I died. I thought, ‘This is incredible. This is the best cartoon I've ever seen in my life.’ At the time I was just shocked at how much life there was in it, how right from the second it started, right to the very end, it was just solid intensity.

“Then I saw ‘Coal Black and De Sebbin Dwarves.’ And week after week I started seeing more. And they weren't just funny—Tex Avery cartoons are funny—but they were brilliantly animated; they had a story; they had personalities. They had all these different levels that other cartoons just didn't have.”

How did the Clampett approach change Kricfalusi's approach to animation? “I didn't have an approach to animation when I saw those cartoons. I was a student. It just gave me inspiration. It changed the direction I was going in, definitely.

“I always liked funny stuff. I never wanted to compete with Walt Disney. I didn't want to do heartfelt stories. I wanted to make people laugh more than anything else. But [the work of Clampett] made me think that you can do other emotions. You

Kricfalusi, circa age seven, at Christmas, life experience that became the grist for his cartoon mill.



Kricfalusi's unused box cover art for the revival of BEANIE & CECIL, axed by a distributor fearful of raising the ire of the lawyers at Walt Disney.

can achieve other feelings with this medium, not just the humor. You can make the characters live.”

But where could he go with this newly instilled sense of purpose? The world-renowned National Film Board of Canada—home of such festival favorites as Norman McLaren and Richard Condie—was one possibility. Kricfalusi rejected the option immediately—“I hated the National Film Board,” was the director's one-sentence dismissal of the issue. Very well, then: Los Angeles—home base of companies like Hanna-Barbera, Dic, Marvel, and Murakami Wolf Swenson. At the time of Kricfalusi's migration in 1979, the place was on the verge of a boom period based on broadcast deregulations that allowed toy manufacturers and production companies to turn cartoon shows into half-hour commercials for the latest line of action figures—good news for the suits, bad news for anyone interested in the artistry of animation.

Of his time in the cartoon mills, Kricfalusi said, “I hate even talking about the state that animation was in. We all know it; everybody's written about it, it's depressing. I want to be optimistic. I want to look towards the future. [I worked on] the same old crap that everybody was doing. HEATHCLIFF, THE SMURFS, some new versions of THE JETSONS where they were trying to ruin them—which I think they did a pretty good job on. All kinds of stuff.”

At the same time, Kricfalusi was beginning to wonder why the approach that Clampett had applied so successfully to

Looney Tunes couldn't be adapted to the pressure-cooker environment of modern, commercial animation. Ideally, what the director sought was a return to the days when artists skilled in the ways of visual humor created gags, rather than leaving the scripting to writers who tended to favor verbal humor (when they managed to create any humor at all). Kricfalusi began making the rounds of the networks, pitching shows featuring such characters as Wally Whimsey, the Goofy Gremlin and Brick Blastoff of the Outback.

It wasn't until his work caught the eye of controversial animation director Ralph Bakshi that things started to fall into place. It was Kricfalusi's visualizations of randy alley cats that punctuated the Bakshi-produced, Rolling Stones rock video, HARLEM SHUFFLE. And when Bakshi convinced CBS to give him a crack at reviving Paul Terry's MIGHTY MOUSE cartoons, it was Kricfalusi who was charged with making something of the moribund character.

“Bakshi convinced Judy Price at CBS to let the artists write the stories,” said Kricfalusi. “And so Tom Minton, Jim Reardon and I wrote all the Mighty Mouse stories. We wrote them as scripts. We didn't write them as storyboards—that would have been too much of a revolution at the time. It wasn't all that bad. At least we were visual people. We had an idea of what would work and what wouldn't.”

All told, Bakshi supported Kricfalusi in this hitherto untried experiment in artistic freedom. Sometimes, though, that support flagged. “He encouraged us to be creative, but he didn't totally give us our head,” said Kricfalusi. “For every script that would get approved by Ralph, probably two would get thrown out. What actually happened was he made us work three times as hard as we really needed to.”

In the end, money disputes cut short Kricfalusi's efforts on THE NEW MIGHTY MOUSE. And, despite the universally positive critical response to the show, Kricfalusi's own judgment is more reserved. “Let me be frank: I didn't know what I was doing. We were trying hard. It was the first chance to really try out our style and my system of production. We rushed through it. We did it really fast and it didn't work. I watch them now and I cringe.”

There followed Kricfalusi's sojourn at Dic, and the subsequent BEANIE AND CECIL debacle (see main article). It's far from Kricfalusi's favorite time period, and he lets a bit of temper show when questioned about his mood after that show's cancellation. “That's just the typical starving artist story. We starved and we stuck to

our principles and we won." What Kricfalusi won, of course, was vindication for his artist-driven approach to animation, via **THE REN & STIMPY SHOW**.

Maybe it was the stern rearing in a military household, or the days of cognitive dissonance in a Europe divided by cement and barbed wire, or the hours spent at the drafting table, drawing Smurfs while dreaming of Daffy Duck. Whatever was the initial motivation, something set the director on a path to excel in an art form so corrupted by the market place that few dared dream of its redemption. To express that drive, Kricfalusi himself fell back on the example of the man who started it all for him.

"It's like total sensory assault, that total imagination—like the anything-goes, try-everything sensibility that Bob Clampett had—that stuck with me. It just completely opened up whole new worlds to me for animation. I just figured, 'Well, you can do anything with animation—look at what this guy did...' If you see any influence in our cartoons, it's probably the intensity. The few cartoons that I think work, like 'Stimpy's Invention' and 'Space Madness' are packed with ideas and packed with execution too—it's not just the ideas, it's the execution. That was totally inspired by Bob Clampett.

"It's the whole feeling of: he's an entertainer and he's only got six minutes to entertain you, but he's not going to hold back. He's going to pack that six minutes with as much entertainment as possible. "That, to me, is the essence of entertainment. Don't hold back from your audience. Give your audience their money's worth." □

Kricfalusi's favorite Bob Clampett Warner Bros cartoon classic, "The Great Piggy Bank Robbery," Inspector Daffy Duck, cowed by a mouse suspect.



**“[Clampett] made me realize you can do other emotions with this medium, not just humor. You can make the characters live.”**

*— Creator John Kricfalusi —*

we can't do this.' And I suggested, 'I don't like this ending [an alternate suggested by Nickelodeon], but why don't we just have him come alive at the end, and then it's okay.' We storyboarded that and they approved that, but later Vanessa called me up and said, 'Listen, don't tell anybody, but let's just not do that ending.' So she was my partner-in-crime on that one."

The pilot was released theatrically as a stand-alone short, garnering accolades as it toured in one of Expanded Entertainment's ANIMATION CELEBRATION collections. Meanwhile Nickelodeon was testing the film with children, and discovering kids to be as enthusiastic about the cartoon as their elders. Based on these results, the decision was made to go with a test run of six, half-hour episodes. Projected debut: August, 1991.

With new infusions of cash, Spumco was turned into a full production facility. But, in moving from one-shot short to full-fledged series, compromises had to be made. One of the first casualties was the hand-inked cels. "We couldn't afford to hand-ink every episode," said Coffey. "That's the main thing. We had the pilot hand-inked, and it was just gorgeous, and we wanted to do the whole series that way. We couldn't."

"They were hand-inked with a brush," said Camp, "which is really rare. We hooked up with a company which was doing all of our ink and paint in Canada, on the pilot [Bardel Animation], and they had a woman that works there who was just a magician with a brush. She hand-inked the show. The cels from it are gorgeous. I'm really sorry now that I didn't snatch some up when they were sitting around in boxes for a long time. They're all gone now. But it's funny: when you're involved in something like this you don't think about it becoming popular, you just think about it as a job. They were just so many pieces of acetate. I didn't think that they'd have any intrinsic value."

**Q** In the face of it, the life cycle of an average REN & STIMPY cartoon was not unlike other animated shows: story conferences, storyboarding, dialogue recording,

1992, Nickelodeon dubbed it the "Lost episode of REN & STIMPY." Many viewers agree it was worth the wait. In **BLACK HOLE**, Commander Hoek and Stimpy get sucked through the titular stellar anomaly, ending up in a dimension where mutations occur every 37 1/2 seconds. In rapid succession, we get a crab-clawed Ren, a big-eyed Stimpy and, in one indelible metamorphosis, a pair of oversized balloon boys. It's neat enough to save the segment from its too-close resemblance to the essentially similar "Marooned."

Not to be too blunt about it, but Kricfalusi's "Stimpy's Invention" may be the greatest kidvid cartoon ever created. A comic nightmare in which the sweet natured Stimpy invents a mind-bogglingly evil device—the Happy Helmet, which forces the unfortunate wearer (Ren, natch) to behave as blissfully brainless as Stimpy himself—this is something you might want to screen privately before letting your kids have a look. It's safe to say that humor and horror rarely blend so smoothly and potently. That's Kricfalusi doing the voice of the Torquemada of kiddie culture, Stinky Wizzleteats—rest assured that his rendition of the idiotic ditty "Happy, Happy, Joy Joy" will reverberate in your subconscious for at least a week.

Includes another Log ad, this one for High



Taking a break from his scientific labors in "Stimpy's Invention," Stimpy quaffs a goggle full of sweat, the idiot savant's toast to success.

Fashion Log for Girls (you nail gowns to it).

The "Black Hole" is, by all accounts, the last Commander Hoek and Stimpy episode. Actually, Camp thought that the segment may have been one too many to begin with: "We ran out of ideas," said Camp. "That was a cartoon I sort of directed. There's no director credit on that, because John really didn't like the story. I wrote it, from an idea by Will McRobb—he's Nickelodeon's story editor on the show. He had an idea, and I took some of his ideas, wrote that story, and storyboarded it. John directed the timing and voices on it, but I directed all the post and all the layout, so it was sort of a co-project between him and me. It was where I got my feet wet as a director."

When informed that fans have been ranking "Black Hole" as their second or third favorite segment, Camp was gratified. "John hated it so much he convinced me I hated it, too. But when I saw it, I thought, 'It's pretty good.' I think it works well with 'Stimpy's Invention.'"

Kricfalusi took serious issue with Camp's accounting of the situation. "It's a complete failure. In every aspect it's bad: it's drawn bad, there's no direction to it and all, the timing's bad. It's a winner by default: somehow the premise managed to get through, even though the specific story points don't illustrate the premise very well. It was lucky.

"The idea did not come from Will McRobb, it came from Jim Smith and me, and I have the notes from it, I have the original premise. Bob wouldn't have known where it came from, because I just handed it to him... There was no director on that

cartoon. A director is somebody who, right from the story stage, follows it all the way through to the end and it's his idea and his vision. Had I followed it through I would have been the director, but I didn't. When the story was written, I handed it to Bob, and said, 'Here, go crazy. Here's an excuse to just go wild. The structure of the story is all figured out, all you gotta do is draw wild drawings and get 'em wilder and wilder and wilder toward the end.' And then I saw the storyboard and I was disappointed, because it just didn't do that.

"Bob saw a lot of the layouts after they were done, and he flipped out. He said, 'Wait a second, these aren't as good as my storyboard drawings.' And I said, 'Yeah, I know. There's not much we can do, because there's no time.' There was nobody to supervise the stuff."

In contrast, "Stimp's Invention" unquestionably contains some of the best, most vivid animation generated for the show—a fact that, when factored in with Nickelodeon's delay in coming to a decision on the cartoon, led to the episode's delayed debut. "I'll tell you what," said Camp, "that cartoon took three or four months longer than it should have. It took a full year to make that cartoon. These cartoons take almost a year to make, but we make them all at the same time, so we can do them in a season, but it was tough, it was *really* tough. John fell so in love with the story that he constantly re-refined everything in it to the point of ridiculousness, until everything was perfect. That's why it's such a good cartoon. But any sane or rational person would've said, 'Ah, it's good enough, as long as it's on time.'"

The origin of Stinky Wizzleteats' name is actually buried in the Spumco scripting process. At one point during the outline stage of "The Littlest Giant," Bob Camp described a shot of a drought-plagued cow's "wizzled-up teats." The coinage so struck Kricfalusi that he resolved to use it in a place where the public could enjoy it as well.

## Second Season

**"I, Powdered Toast Man, do solemnly swear to relieve the American citizens of their basic human rights."**

—P.T.M., making overt what recent administrations have kept covert, in "Powdered Toast Man"

### IN THE ARMY

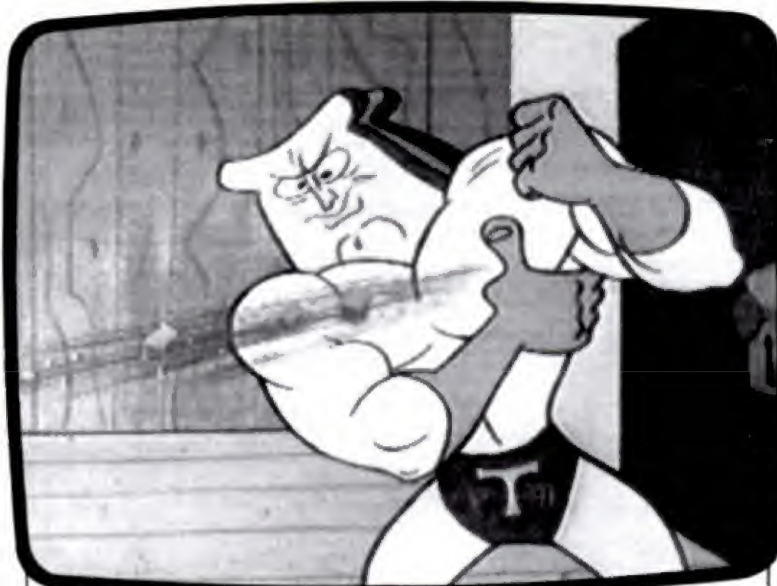
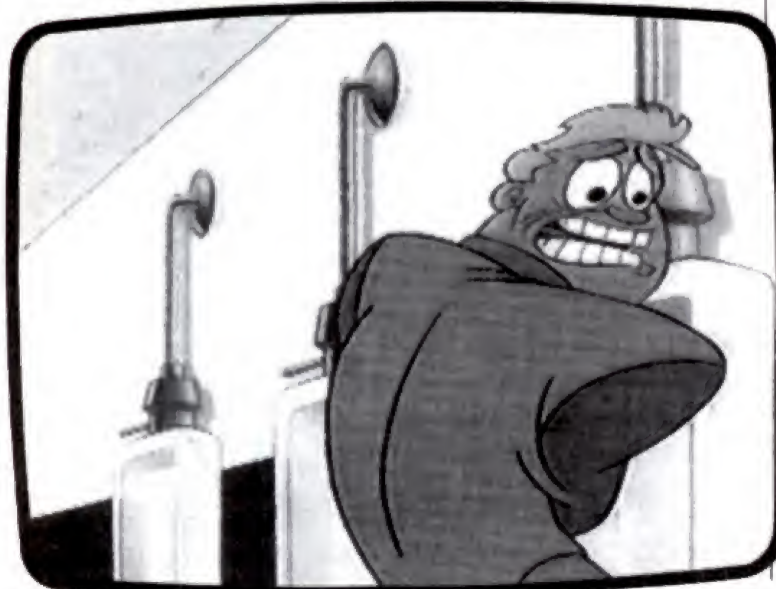
8/92. Directed by Bob Camp. ★★

### POWDERED TOAST MAN

8/92. Directed by John Kricfalusi. ★

In Camp's "In The Army," the armed forces prove even more recruit hungry than we've feared, passing Ren and Stimpy through the enlistment process in a matter of seconds, then saddling them with an overgrown drill sergeant so Southern-fried he would give BILOXI BLUES' Chris Walken the

"Powdered Toast Man" had a political edge that riled some viewers. Here the superhero comes to the aid of the President, caught in his own zipper.



"Powdered Toast Man," the series' first cartoon to feature a character other than Ren & Stimpy, attacking with his hyper-corrosive croutons.

shivers (the closest he gets to a genuine, English sentence is something that parses as "Hebowv floov!"). Things have, no doubt, gotten desperate in the military since the fall of Communism, but Ren and Stimpy discover oddities beyond imagination, including the peeling of H-bombs for KP duty, and an eventual promotion into the tank paratrooper corps. REN & STIMPY's debt to Looney Tunes is directly acknowledged with the appearance of Raymond Scott's *Toy Trumpet* on the soundtrack—from this point on, titles from the catalog of this master of novelty tunes (whose compositions were freely borrowed by Looney Tunes composer Carl Stalling) will show up more and more often in the background.

Ren and Stimpy only appear briefly during Kricfalusi's "Powdered Toast Man." Otherwise, this is the first REN & STIMPY cartoon to shift focus to another character, as well as the first to highlight its celebrity voices during the opening credits. Follow Powdered Toast Man (announcer Gary Owens) as he makes his daily rounds: saving a little kitten from becoming road pizza (while totalling a jumbo jet in the process), rescuing the Pope (Frank Zappa!) from the evil clutches of guest villain Muddy Mudskipper, solving a dire, presidential emergency (the Commander-in-Chief has gotten himself caught in his zipper) in a fashion that allows P.T.M. to be declared interim president. Ren and Stimpy are wedged into the action in what is essentially a recycling of last season's Powdered Toast commercial. The cartoon's best moment is the end, when P.T.M. blithely throws the Constitution and the Bill of Rights onto the Oval Office fire.

For some reason, the animation on both cartoons seems to lack the expressiveness that was so impressive in the previous season's efforts. When it is suggested to Kricfalusi that such a failure might be the fault of the new animation studio used for these episodes, Rough Draft Korea, he shoots back with, "I think what you're calling animation, you're probably thinking of something else—because the animation was much better. When I saw 'In The Army,' I was shocked at how good the animation was. Maybe you're talking about *characterization*... We draw the acting here. If a cartoon doesn't have good acting in it, blame us, don't blame the animation studio. We draw all the acting expressions, and we match them to the dialogue, or we don't. If we don't draw them, they don't end up in the film. The animators aren't doing the acting, they're doing the motion. But the actual motion in 'In The Army' was really good. And, personally, I thought 'Powdered Toast Man' was great."

Meanwhile, the fact that one of the most powerful religious figures on Earth (voiced by Tipper Gore's least favorite rock star) appears in a supporting role actually caused less anxiety from the corporate wing than might be expected. "I tried to get the Pope in last year," said Kricfalusi. "At one point, they said you can't even say the word Pope on television. I guess they figured we'd all go to Hell if we did... But then, for some reason, I

animation and post-production. It was when you got down to specifics that the differences became noticeable. Start with who the Spumco Big Shots felt was capable of scripting for their series. "We have a real strict theory about cartooning," said Camp. "The best cartoons, if you go through history, have been written by cartoonists, not by writers. If you can't draw, we don't want you to write."

Gag sessions would be attended by Kricfalusi, Camp, Vincent Waller, Richard Pursel and Elinor Blake. "We'd sit around and throw out ideas and flesh them out and take notes. Then we'd sit down at a computer and write out a four-, five-page outline—which is basically just a story structure. The actual cartoon was written in the storyboard... whoever wrote it drew it, storyboarded it out. That was where all the dialogue was born and the acting."

Noted Kricfalusi, "After the storyboard artist does the storyboard, I write the dialogue—but I get the storyboard artist to tell the story in pictures first, without even thinking of the dialogue most of the time. Usually the storyboard artist will write some rough dialogue just to get the idea across, but I don't encourage that. I usually encourage them to tell the story in pictures, so that somebody can follow it without the dialogue. I don't necessarily care what the words are, as long as the expression says the emotion that the character is feeling, which then tells you the story."

According to Spumco art director, Jim Smith, "It's not much different from the way it was done in the '40s and '50s at Warner Bros. In those days, it was all written by the artists themselves, the cartoonists, and they wrote visually. In the '60s and '70s it changed. They were written by writers who were not artists and it became a real assembly line thing. The script was given to the artist, who pretty much had to follow what was there. That's the way it is everywhere else in town. We took it back, tried doing it the old way, which is why the cartoons have more personality and more visual humor. Everybody on the crew is invited to come in and look at the storyboard which is pinned up on the wall and throw in ideas, add a gag so long as it doesn't deviate from the main premise. This is what gives [a cartoon] all of its depth—there are a lot of gags that work on a lot of different levels."

Spumco's outline and storyboard would be sent to Nickelodeon for approval. "We worked very closely with John on the stories," said Coffey, who credited Nick story editors Will McRobb and Mitchell Kriegmann. "We'd make comments on the premise, or we'd decide not to do it." (That's not quite the way Kricfalusi recalled the process, but more on that later.)

After meeting the network's approval,

**“The best cartoons, historically, have been written by cartoonists, not by writers. If you can't draw, we don't want you to write.”**

**- Artist Bob Camp -**

the dialogue tracks were recorded. Despite the seemingly unhinged nature of most episodes, Camp noted that little of what was committed to tape hadn't previously been documented on the storyboard. “We couldn't really do a lot of [improvisation] because that also fell under the approval process. Any changes we made in the recording process, we'd have to backtrack, readjust and rewrite the dialogue in the board and send that to Nickelodeon for final approval.”

Following recording, the dialogue was timed, and the story went to layout, where the director and staff established the key poses of the cartoon on paper. This was done at Spumco's facilities in Los Angeles, where, at its peak, up to 50 people were employed, with many assuming multiple roles during the production process. Among the upper echelon, Camp received credit for storyboarding and background design, Jim Smith served as art director and character designer, while Lynne Naylor did character design and layout. Spumco's designs are sent to other studios for actual animation. Canadian animation studios Carunkle Cartoons and Ottawa's Lacewood did REN & STIMPY's first six first season shows. Kricfalusi was turned on to using Rough Draft Korea second season by Spumco producer Libby Simon.

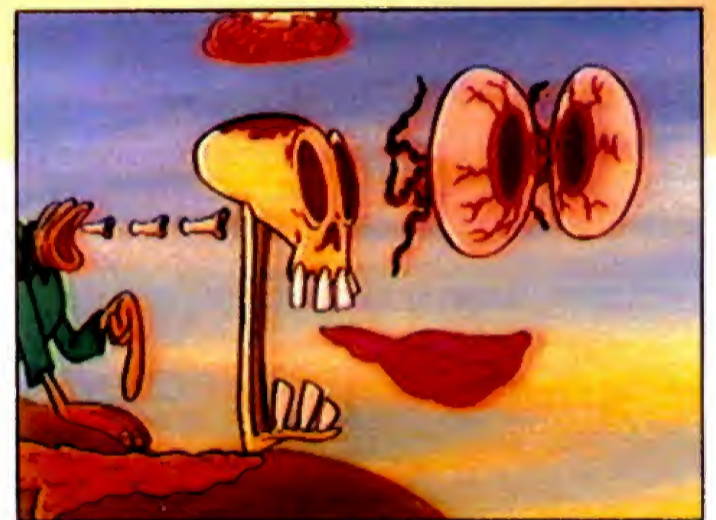
The completed animation is returned to the states for post-production done by Spumco at rented facilities. Camp credited [Henry Porch] for culling effects and music from sound libraries. “We didn't have any experience in sound when we started this,” said Kricfalusi. “Animation is so compartmentalized that, even though I was a



Ren & Stimpy as tank paratroopers in second season's "In The Army," directed by Bob Camp. Inset: Ren's Tex Avery-like double take on meeting his sergeant.

producer and director for years at other studios, the sound would be totally out of my domain. It would have to go to somebody else to direct the sound, which doesn't make any sense. I swore that I was going to go back to the way people used to do sound effects. The first thing to really know is, just because it's a cartoon, you don't have to make every sound effect obnoxious. You don't make every sound effect wacky, because you'll just grate at people, which most cartoons do today. It took a lot of work with our sound effects editors just to get them out of the Saturday morning cartoon mode, to stop putting wacky sound effects on every move.”

As to how much all this effort cost, both Nickelodeon and Spumco were reluctant to discuss figures. “It's slightly higher than your average, Saturday morning cartoon,” said Camp, “but if you stack up the product, it's a real bargain. We do ten times the production value of any other studio in



town, for Saturday morning or for any kind of TV cartoon, at only a slightly higher budget.” (The *Los Angeles Times* had pegged the half-hour price at \$400,000, comparing it to the Saturday morning standard of \$250,000.)

Money, though, was just one of the areas of contention between Nickelodeon and Spumco. Even before the break came, signs of strain were beginning to show. “We see the finish line, but we realize there's not really enough time to do all the work, so the panic is on right now,” said Camp last August, at the beginning of the show's second season. “We're all pulling our hair out. We're all crazy. When it gets like this, every now and then we start screaming at



**GEORGE LIQUOR**

Early supporting roles as (l) the Sheriff of Dodge City with Stimpy as Maid Moron in “Robin Hoek,” and characteristically as the irate homeowner in “The Boy Who Cried Rat,” shooting Ren & Stimpy away from his garbage dumpster. Liquor's starring role in the as-yet-unaired “Man's Best Friend” led to Kricfalusi's firing.



Stimpy proudly displays his "magic nose goblins" in the goodbye bumper following "Nurse Stimpy," humor that upset Nickelodeon but delighted fans.

each other and have a few fistfights, and then we break beer bottles over our heads. And then we're friends again."

Obviously, in such an environment, only the strongest survive. "It's a tough studio," said Camp. "The reason it's a small studio is because we can't really find any people who can hack it. You get your battle scars, 'cause we're real picky at every level, about every aspect of production."

Under such conditions, what's Kricfalusi like to work with? "He's very demanding," Camp said. "He has such a clear vision of what he wants, strong convictions and artistic integrity. He doesn't bend much. He knows what he's doing. He knows what he wants. The show is a direct reflection of those qualities in him. The show would not be as good if he weren't that way. He knows when something sucks, and he has no qualms about telling you, either."

**A**s layout artist on the show's truncated second season, Eddie Fitzgerald was able to experience the Kricfalusi direction style firsthand. "John does spend a lot of time with the layout artists," said Fitzgerald. "Unlike any other animation producer in the business—that I know of, anyway—he spends all the time he can with the artists. That's why it's worth working there! What John's looking for when he interviews artists is...he's looking for skill, and he's looking for the class clown. Anybody else in town weeds the class clowns out real fast, and John is like, 'Come to me! Come to me! I'll take you!'"

Observed Nickelodeon's Coffey about Kricfalusi, before his ouster, "He always takes on too much, because he's a perfectionist. It's a problem, because sometimes things are delayed a little bit. It's not a big problem. We always get the best shows out of John. He always comes through with wonderful stuff. It's hard for us to tell him not to do his show perfectly, or try to pull him off a show to make an airdate."

# Ren & Stimpy

## STIMPY'S INVENTION

*Screamingly funny, this dark little cartoon pushes for more than giggles.*

By Dan Persons

With rare exceptions (Barry Manilow albums, the FRIDAY THE 13TH series), you can't get much lower on the aesthetic scale than kidvid animation. Even when the occasional savior comes along—a Paul Reubens, a Ralph Bakshi—the network suits are always there, conspiring to make sure that the wee ones aren't confronted with anything that would take their minds off the next wave of Fruity Pebbles ads.

That's the way it's been. And if you think that's the way it will forever be, then, buddy, you've never seen "Stimpy's Invention."

Appearing as one segment of Nickelodeon's popular REN & STIMPY SHOW, "Stimpy's Invention" initially does little to telegraph the dangers that lurk within. The setup is pure REN & STIMPY: Stimpy, the dim-witted cat, goads his Chihuahua friend Ren Hoek into helping him test some of his latest inventions. Predictably, the upshot is an enraged Ren, who struggles mightily to reach Stimpy's throat. The ever-slow feline comes to a remarkable conclusion: "Say," he confides to the audience, "you don't suppose Ren is *unhappy*?" With tears brimming in his eyes, Stimpy declares that he has found his one, true calling: to use his "gift of invention" to alleviate Ren's pain.

Here's where things start to get nasty. What Stimpy invents is the Happy Helmet, a chrome gadget that looks like a cross between a toaster and a bit of Flash Gordon headgear. Stimpy wastes no time in permanently affixing the thing to Ren's skull, informing him, while proffering a remote control box, that never again will the Chihuahua be unhappy. His pal has time for one obligatory insult ("You sick, little monkey...!") before Stimpy punches a button, and Ren is plunged into a mortal struggle with

the device.

It's a losing battle, of course, even with Ren's best efforts at a Bill Shatner imitation ("Must...fight...it...Can't...lose... control..."). When the Chihuahua finally surrenders, what he winds up as would give the Pod People nightmares: "SO...HAPPY!" he shrieks, his face broken into a strained, toothy grin, his dialogue punctuated with a fearsomely hysterical laugh, "Must go do...good things for Stimpy!"

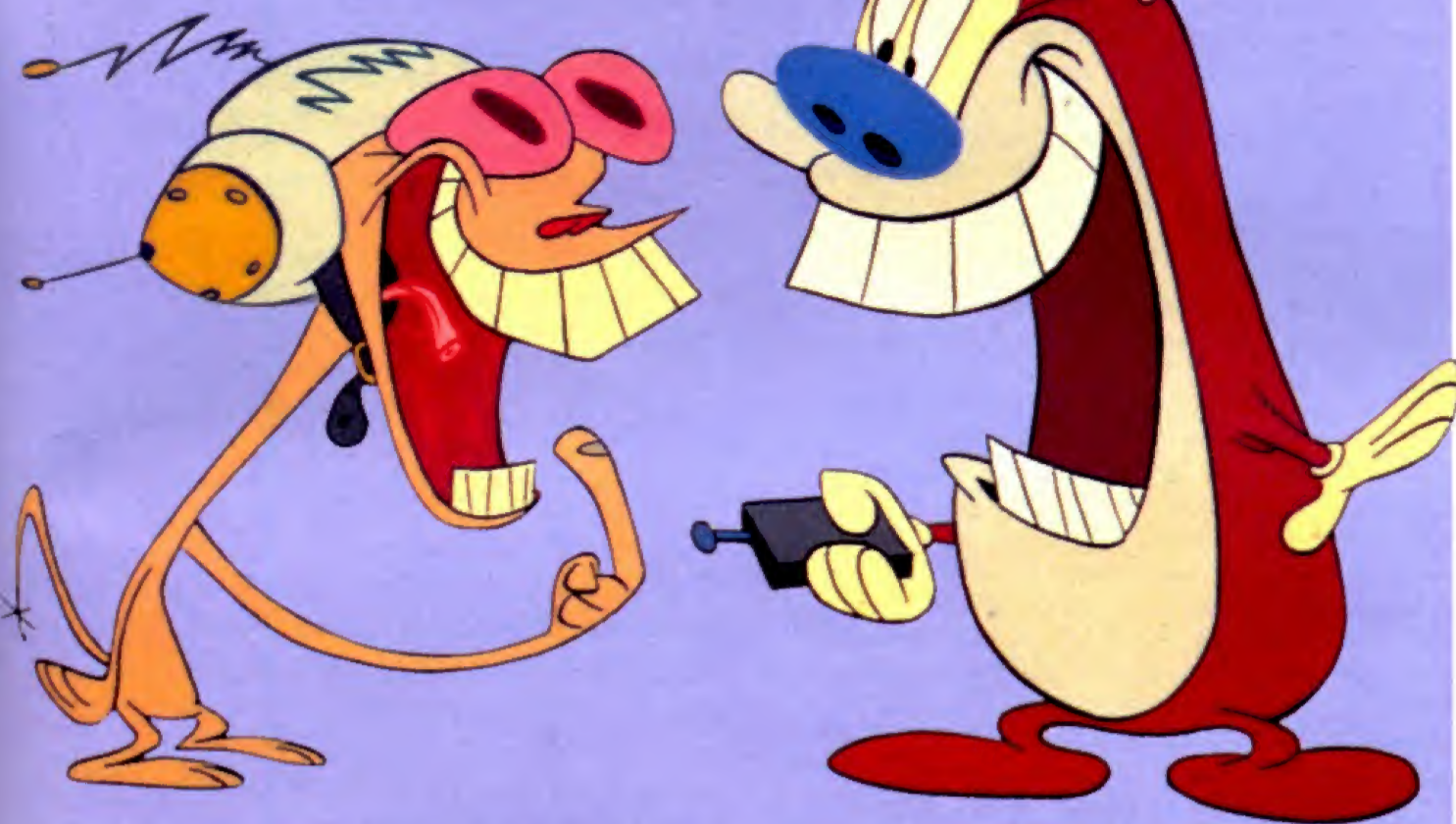
This, for Stimpy, is an unqualified victory. For Ren, it's pure hell, made worse when he's forced to dance to Stimpy's favorite song—an idiotic ditty called "Happy Happy, Joy Joy." Pushed to the limit, the Chihuahua finally cracks, zealously taking a hammer to his helmeted head, freeing himself just in time to grab his friend by the throat. The only thing that saves the cat from certain death is a flash of realization on Ren's part: "Hey," the Chihuahua shouts, "I feel *great*! I love being angry!"

It's pretty wicked stuff, and way out of the norm for standard kidvid. In fact, *everything* about "Stimpy's Invention" suggests that all involved knew they were working on something special. The visuals—from Ren's temper tantrums, to a transformation sequence that has the Chihuahua's face fracturing into a riot of angles, to the following sequences in which every portion of Ren's body seems determined to go in a

Look out, Ren: decked out in '50s sci-fi chic, Stimpy stands at the forefront of a major scientific breakthrough, the "Happy Helmet."







"Happy, Happy, Joy, Joy!" Ren (l) dances to the tune of inventor Stimpy's Happy Helmet, Kricfalusi's cartoon masterpiece, a comic horror story that speaks volumes about free will, heady stuff for kidvid animation.

different direction—contain some of the best animation the program has yet offered. Even the cost-cutting static shots, employed mostly in the central inventor's montage, exhibit a sophistication not previously seen.

But there's more to "Stimpy's Invention" than just technical proficiency. There have been frequent hints that director John Kricfalusi and company have been pushing for more than mere giggles with their dark, little cartoons. Here, they come out of the closet with a comic horror story that speaks volumes about free will and the dangers of forcing one's own bliss upon others. There's an unusual reversal of roles in this episode, with the usually benign Stimpy taking an almost sadistic delight in controlling Ren's moods, while Ren—normally too short-tempered and violent to win much sympathy—becomes a figure of pure tragedy, condemned to a brainless euphoria not his own, and not under his control. The dog's plight is capitalized on magnificently, with the impressive "Happy Happy, Joy Joy" sequence offered as the curdled icing on the poisoned cake.

The song itself is a piece of work: it's

His laboratory equipped with tools like a power beaver and a hydraulic mallard, the idiot savant gets results that others can't.

nothing less than the aural equivalent of the Happy Helmet, complete with semi-subliminal audio over-lays and singer Stinky Wizzleteats' (Kricfalusi, again) I've-skipped-my-medication-today interjections ("I don't think you're happy enough!").

Even after Ren has saved himself, there's no easy out. As if it isn't a clear enough contradiction that a short-tempered Ren could achieve happiness only by indulging the worst of his anger, Kricfalusi underlines the moment with one of the most bizarre fade-outs the series has yet provided: an abrupt cut from a two-shot of Ren and Stimpy to a static close-up of the Chihuahua grinning maniacally while Happy Helmet laughter echoes in the background. Ren's freed himself from one brand of enslavement, perhaps only to deliver himself into another. The character comes full circle—Beckett would have been proud.

Maybe that's too heavy for what's supposed to be a simple kid's cartoon. Maybe it's also too extreme to suggest that not only is "Stimpy's Invention" the best segment of the series so far, it may be the

best bit of made-for-television animation in decades (and, just in case I forgot to mention it, it's also screamingly funny). It's a revelatory few minutes—as challenging to one's preconceptions of the medium as Walt Disney's SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS, or Chuck Jones' DUCK AMUCK. With only 18 REN & STIMPY episodes under their belts before they were canned by Nickelodeon, the artists of Spumco never got to demonstrate all they were capable of. □

guess a different story editor read the story of 'Stimpy's Big Day,' with the mention (in a Stimpy-penned poem) of 'I may not be the president/I may not be the Pope./But as long as I have Gritty Kitty,/I shall never mope.' And that made it through. So little by little, I kept bringing up the Pope, because I think the Pope is just meant for cartoons. You gotta have the Pope in cartoons.

"I pitched this cartoon I wanted to do where the Pope is a pal of Stimpy's. He's on the same hockey team, and every Thursday night, Stimpy and the Pope go out and play road-hockey together. And then the Pope loses his job one day, and so Stimpy says, 'Why don't you come over and live in my house? Ren won't mind.' And then we get all these gags of the Pope driving Ren crazy: he's sleeping in-between Ren and Stimpy, Ren can never find his cigarettes and we cut to the Pope sitting in the living room on the couch and he's got little bits of tobacco on his lips. Needless to say, that story never made it."

**"Now, the nerve endings are the tastiest parts of the body, and the Tooth Beaver knows this."**

—Facts never covered in dental school, as per Stimpy in "Ren's Toothache"

## REN'S TOOTHACHE

★★

8/92. Directed by John Kricfalusi.

Alpha/omega time at Nickelodeon, as one of the most recent segments gets matched with the pilot, "Big House Blues," plugged into the latter half of the show to fill the gap caused by the banning of "Man's Best Friend." Debatable one of the few REN & STIMPY episodes to deliver a conventional, positive social message, this is a cheery, nighttime story in which Ren undergoes the tortures of the damned because, unlike good



A nerve-ending fairy from "Ren's Toothache." Stimpy's brand of dental mythology turns out to be real as Ren endures the tortures of the damned.

buddy Stimpy, he's failed to observe proper dental hygiene. The animation still seems to be finding its way back to the proficiency of the first season, but the segment is redeemed by such weirdnesses as a reversed playing of the *Nutcracker Suite* for some nocturnal shots, and bedside sequences in which Stimpy expounds upon his own brand of dental mythology, replete with Tooth Beavers and Nerve-Ending Fairies (all of whom, naturally, turn out to actually exist).

Think the cuts to "Big House Blues" were made, as Nickelodeon has suggested, for time considerations? This episode also includes a new commercial for Sugar Frosted Milk ("It stays lumpy, even in cereal!"), a new "Ask Dr. Stupid," in which Stimpy describes the pecking order inside your average can of baked beans, and repeats of the Ren and Stimpy Oath and the Log for Girls commercial. Was the sight of Ren kissing Stimpy that offensive?

"When I was a kid," said Kricfalusi, of a





Three-fingered Hoek and Stupid the Kid ride into town in "Out West," one of Kricfalusi's simpler cheater cartoons, designed to meet the schedule.

formative event, "when I heard about the Tooth Fairy, I got real excited. My dad told me I'd get a dime for one of my teeth. I put my tooth under a pillow. Sure enough, I got a dime. I thought that was the coolest thing ever. A few days later I was down in a quarry somewhere and I found a horse's head. I looked at his teeth and I thought, 'This is gold!' I yanked all his giant teeth out of his mouth and piled them under my pillow and waited and waited—I thought I was going to get a fortune. Nothing happened. I started crying one day and Dad asked me, 'What the hell's wrong?' I said, 'It's my 16th birthday and I still haven't seen a cent for these giant teeth under my pillow.' And he whipped me.

"I always thought it was funny that adults lie to kids about so many things. First of all, they tell you that it's a bad thing to lie, and then there's a hundred million acceptable lies that you can tell your kids. And they're the most ridiculous, wildest things ever: a big, fat man in a red suit, lives at the North Pole and crawls down your chimney at night, filling your socks with presents. Who came up with *that*? How do you get anybody to swallow *that*? But I loved it."

**"Oh, the Lord loves a hangin',  
That's why he give us necks.  
It tightens up our vocal chords,  
And loosens up our pecs.  
So if you are a horse thief,  
And guilty to the bone.  
Go ahead and blame a friend,  
And you won't hang alone."**

—Happy hangin' hoedown  
from "Out West."

#### OUT WEST

9/92. Directed by Bob Camp.

★★★

#### RUBBER NIPPLE SALESMEN

9/92. Directed by Vincent Walker and John Kricfalusi.

★★★

The Spumco Big Shots hit their second season stride in this episode. "We sure are ignorant, aren't we?" says Sheriff Abner to Deputy Ewalt, right at the start of Camp's "Out West." Yup, he's right, they are dumb. They're *real* dumb. They're so dumb that the FINAL JEOPARDY theme has to play anytime someone asks them a dumb question, just to bridge the lull. They're so dumb that they've managed to hang everybody in town before the opening credits. They're so dumb that they think hiring a pair of freelance villains—Three-Fingered Hoek (Ren) and Stupid The Kid (guess who?)—will get them a couple more fresh corpses. Guess again. Lots of great held takes of characters staring blankly into space, plus the return of Mr. Horse (who, not surprisingly, is smarter than anyone else in town) and a swell hoedown closer.

"Rubber Nipple Salesmen," directed by Kricfalusi and Vincent Walker—in his debut effort—is one weird cartoon. The good news is

that Ren and Stimpy have found themselves some gainful employment, hawking Stimpy's hand-turned rubber nipples from a suitably decorated Good Humor truck. The bad news is that the neighborhood in which they choose to peddle their wares happens to be the place where all the characters from previous REN & STIMPY episodes live. Mr. Horse appears again—here in a new, ultra-paranoid phase—as well as "Fire Dogs" Fire Chief and "The Boy Who Cried Rat's" suburbanites.

"Out West" may be one of Kricfalusi's "cheater" cartoons—designed to deliver the laughs without the more sophisticated and time-consuming character development of such efforts as "Space Madness"—but it's a damn funny cheater, nonetheless. "I thought it was animated brilliantly," said Kricfalusi. "There was great animation in that cartoon. I wrote the thing in about 15 minutes, it was completely designed as a generic cartoon. In fact, Nickelodeon hated it at first, when they read it. And so Bob and I flew to New York, and we acted it out. He did Abner and I did Ewalt, and then they kind of got it. And at the time, I had this idea for a song—I said, 'Let's end the cartoon with a song: *The Lord Loves a Hangin'. That's Why He Give Us Necks.*' That's all we wall had at the beginning, and they loved the idea... I thought [it] was the best part of the cartoon."

If the ending for "Out West" was pure inspiration, the ending for "Rubber Nipple Salesmen," in which Ren and Stimpy find themselves abruptly booted onto the backs of a pair of stampeding bulls, was pure non-sequitur. "That was supposed to be the ending for 'Robin Hoek,' as a matter of fact," said Kricfalusi. "One of the things that really pissed me off about 'Robin Hoek' was the predictable ending. It was the stock ending for a dream cartoon: was it a dream or wasn't it? I *hated* that ending. In fact, when I was first writing that cartoon, I called [Nick's] Vanessa [Coffey] and said, 'Listen, you don't want to have the typical ending where Ren wakes up and thinks it was a dream and turns to Stimpy and Stimpy's still in the clothes from the cartoon and then we wonder if it was a dream or not? You don't want to do that cliché ending, do you?' And they said, 'Oh, absolutely not.' And I said, 'Great! Here's the ending: let's do an ending where Ren wakes up and says "Thank goodness it was only a dream," and turns to Stimpy and all of a sudden the floor drops out and they fall through the sky out of their beds, they land on bulls and bulls run off into the horizon! And they looked at me like I was insane. It was like they just wanted to get out of the room. And they said, 'Do the cliché ending.'"

Nor were the brass too enamored of an aborted sequence featuring Kricfalusi's psychotic human, George Liquor. "They come to the door and it opens up, and Ren and Stimpy get nothing out of their mouths. George sees them, instantly takes his bludgeoning oar, whacks them both on the head,

Ren demonstrates 1001 uses for rubber nipples, such as finger cots "for touching filthy and disgusting things," in "Rubber Nipple Salesmen."



**“[‘Stimpy’s Invention’]  
was one of the shows  
Nickelodeon hated. I  
had to throw myself on  
my knees and beg them  
to let me do it.”**

— Creator John Kricfalusi —

There were, however, times during the first season when the network's patience was sorely tested. One of the program's most celebrated cartoons, "Stimpy's Invention," was originally billed by Nick as "The lost episode of REN & STIMPY," due to its late delivery date. "[Kricfalusi] wanted it perfect," said Vanessa Coffey, "so it took longer. We thought it was lost forever. I kept saying, 'John, where is it?'"

Remembered Camp, "We killed ourselves on [‘Stimpy's Invention’]. That's why we never finished it. We kept fucking with it and fine-tuning it... I actually storyboarded the whole show. The key poses I came up with. A guy named Mark Kausler—he's been around forever—did the really great hammer bashing in the head sequence and the part of the dance where Stimpy's lying on his back, popping his butt back and forth. That show was a magic combination. The drawings are from my board and when I board, I don't do a lot of rough sketches like a lot of people do. I'm very specific—it's just the way I work. It was my drawings coupled with John being fanatical about this cartoon and not letting up on any point, beating everybody to death to get perfection."

Countered Kricfalusi, "It took longer because it took forever for them [Nickelodeon] to approve it. That was one of the one's they hated. They wanted me to throw it out completely when they saw the storyboard—they just did not get it. Finally, I had to throw myself on my knees and just beg [Coffey] to let me do it. I cut a bunch of stuff out at the storyboard stage."

Unfortunately, even when the Spumco Big Shots were successful in making their air-dates, they sometimes discovered that Nickelodeon wished they hadn't. Over the series lifespan—as with "Stimpy's Invention" above—there were points when Nick and Spumco didn't see eye-to-eye on the suitability of a REN & STIMPY cartoon, even after a storyboard had been approved. During an interview last August, Coffey denied that there was any significant friction between the producers and Nickelodeon, "We have had some differences. They are minor differences. We like to

# Ren & Stimpy



## GEORGE LIQUOR

*How Kricfalusi's all-American hero proved the bane of Nickelodeon execs.*

By Dan Persons

He has the physique of a fireplug on steroids and a laugh that erupts without warning or provocation. He is a man of strong opinions, so strong that woe betide the human, animal, or object that would dare contradict him. He is quick to anger, quick to forgive, and quick to forget what he's forgiven just 'cause the anger feels so damn good. He's George Liquor, John Kricfalusi's most sophisticated, and most controversial, creation, and, if the folks at Nickelodeon had demonstrated a little more courage, he'd likely be as hot a commodity as his two cherished pets, Ren and Stimpy.

Liquor was in Kricfalusi's repertoire long before Ren and Stimpy ever found their way to the screen. A rather buck-toothed version of him (characteristically brandishing a rifle) graces the sample artwork for Kricfalusi's proposed YOUR GANG series. During REN & STIMPY's first season, Liquor sneaked into the plotlines of "Robin Hoek" and "The Boy Who Cried Rat," in the former as the Sheriff of Dodge City, in the latter as the homeowner who chases Ren and Stimpy away from a dumpster. But it wasn't until the start of discussions for the second season that Kric-

falusi was able to get a go-ahead from Nickelodeon executive Vanessa Coffey to develop Liquor into a full-fledged player in the REN & STIMPY universe. The initial results: "Man's Best Friend" and "Dog Show," two cartoons that showed the character off at his manic, psycho-dad best (and that so repelled Nick execs that the two episodes were summarily pulled from their scheduled air-dates).

"He's basically a middle-American guy," said Kricfalusi of the character. "He's a regular, American male. He's a middle-aged guy, kinda from a lost era, actually. He's from the lodge era, when there were men's lodges—I guess there are a few left, though I don't think it's what it used to be. He's a man who loves his pets, loves his friends, and...uh...hates everyone else.

"I wanted a foil for Ren and Stimpy that wasn't evil. Archie Bunker isn't evil, but he definitely has a lot of traits that you don't like and you wouldn't agree with. But by no means is he evil—he's a guy that you would love if you knew him, but at the same time you're pissed off at a lot of the shit that he does. Like a dad, you know? You love your dad, but he sure tells you some crazy shit when you're a kid."

It's in fact this ambivalent reaction to the character that may have so unnerved the kidvid programmers. For all his rages and manias, there's something touching



Kricfalusi's model sheet for smiling George, whose starring roles in both "Man's Best Friend" and "Dog Show" got pulled from airing by Nickelodeon execs.

about George Liquor. His screams are as easily recognizable as the anguished, end-of-the-world wails you hear from a three-year-old who has been denied sprinkles for his ice cream. The set of his opinions, rooted so firmly that no amount of evidence to the contrary can sway him, has a seductive appeal—if only we could all be as secure in our world views as he is.

"George's heart is in the right place," said Kricfalusi. "He truly believes that what he's telling you is good for you. He would never do anything that he doesn't believe in. In a lot of cartoons, good and evil is cut and dried: you're just one or the other. There's nobody really evil in our cartoons. Not that we set out to say we're going to have cartoons where nobody's evil, it's just we never needed to. We managed to get conflict with people who have faults, but are not necessarily black or white. The faults cause the conflict."

That apparently was too much for the Nickelodeon folks, who were so unimpressed with George Liquor that they happily returned the rights to Kricfalusi when the director and his staff were fired from THE REN & STIMPY SHOW. That may have been a miscalculation—Kricfalusi is already talking of teaming short, mercurial George up with the blissfully stupid Jimmy, the Hapless Boy to form a team that in temper and motivation bears a close resemblance to the dog and cat duo that preceded them. In short: Nick owns the images of Ren and Stimpy, while Kricfalusi retains their hearts and souls. The packaging may be a bit different, but Kricfalusi's edgy, outrageous humor may have found new life in a new home. □



## GEORGE LIQUOR

Close and friendly with his favorite pet. Nickelodeon so disliked the character they returned the rights to Spumco, a move that might come back to haunt them.



Spumco's musical director Henry Porch, in his spare time a keyboardist for the gothic band "London After Midnight," giving the cartoons a distinctive sound.

throw things around, at each other, ideas. But I would say that our relationship is very special and I wouldn't say that we've ever locked horns."

Camp saw otherwise. "They're real nervous about the weird ones," he said, "and they sort of don't want them. But, after they're big hits, everybody likes them. They think we're constantly trying to pull something. I don't know where they got that idea."

Remembered Fitzgerald, "[Kricfalusi] fought for his independence. The problem is, he had to fight so much that it put grey hairs on him. It took away from the time he should've been working on the show. John's the best artist in the world and any minute that he's away from the drawing board is a shame. After a conversation with Nickelodeon, he wouldn't be able to work, sometimes for the rest of the day. I felt sorry for the guy."

**S**uch grief characterized the exchanges involved with both "Stimp's Invention" and another cornerstone of REN & STIMPY fanship—"Space Madness." "We had to fight with Nickelodeon on them," said Camp. "We scared the shit out of them. We have piles of stories that we wanted to do that they didn't want to do. It's a constant struggle, and it's not to say that it's their fault. It's our fault too. We have our vision of what we want to do and they have their vision of what they want us to do, so there's going to be conflict. But I think that the only way to get stuff that's on the edge is to be on the edge. You can't do this show on a casual basis. We've all got lots of nice scars from it."

Said Kricfalusi, "I want to really get across to your readers how much they hated ['Space Madness' and 'Stimp's Invention']. With 'Stimp's Invention,' they told me, 'Throw this storyboard out. You've got to do a new story. This is horrible. They

# Ren & Stimpy

## SPACE MADNESS

*The anatomy of an episode, how Kricfalusi's Spumco system operates.*

*By Dan Persons*

"Space Madness" had its birth in a bar in Hollywood, where John Kricfalusi sat down at the start of the series with fellow Spumco Big Shot Jim Smith to brainstorm ideas for SF cartoons. What they came up with was a page labeled "Sci-Fi Jokes," dated 11/14/90, many of which would find their way into either "Space Madness" or its follow-up, "Marooned."

Five days later Kricfalusi and Smith worked their concept into a premise, the first, formal step in the production process. The premise of the episode was sent to Nickelodeon for approval. The three-page document dated 11/19/90 outlines many of the concepts that would be used in the cartoon, but is light on plot structure, and missing one major set-piece: the bathtub breakdown of Commander Hoek.

With the premise approved by Nickelodeon, "Space Madness" moved into the outline stage, going through several drafts to refine the plot line and most of the gags. The outline includes a rough description of each scene that will make up the cartoon, including Ren's bathtub breakdown centerpiece present in Spumco's third draft outline, dated 1/17/91. Missing from the finished episode was an outlined closing in which Commander Hoek and Stimpy traveled into the past to alter history.

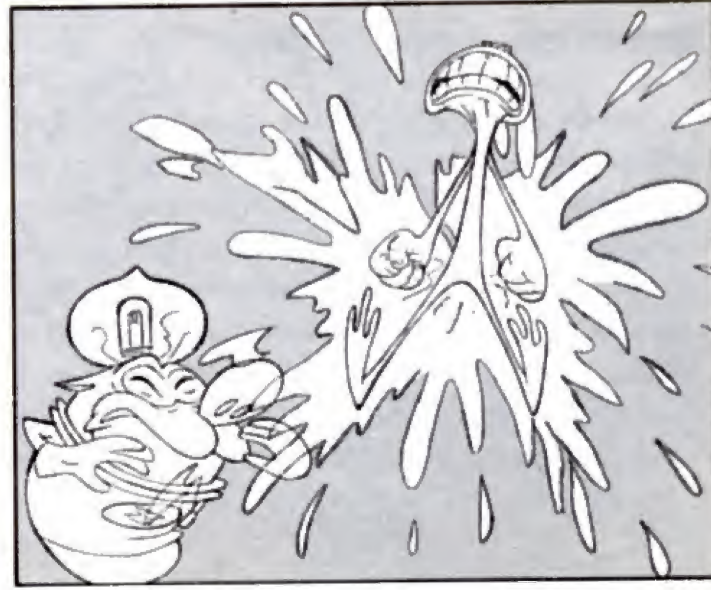
With the writing completed, Spumco artists Jim Smith and Chris Reccardi went

to work on the episode's storyboard (right). Unlike sketchier, live-action boards, Spumco's boards are well-detailed, locking down the look of each shot before it moves to the layout stage. A comparison of the boards to the layouts and the completed cartoon shows just how close the storyboard concepts approach what finally appeared on screen. The boards are enhanced in the later layout stage, an example being the rather ordinary spaceship given the look of a tacky windup toy.

The final stage of work done at Spumco is the layout process: transforming the sketches of the storyboard into full-size drawings that illustrate the extremes of each action in a shot (below) and provide the scene's background. Spumco tends to time animation so that emphasis is placed on these extremes, where careful drafting of what John Kricfalusi calls the scene's "acting" carries the emotional weight for each shot.

The completed layouts are shipped to outside animators, in this case to Carbunkle Cartoons in Canada, where the drawings are turned into finished animation cels and photographed. Depending on the skills of the animators handling the project, this could be a simple matter of "filling in the blanks" between each layout extreme, or of applying the animator's own skills to the action to give each movement more personality. (Carbunkle became the favored studio at Spumco for such "plussing.") □

Spumco renders detailed, full-size layout drawings for each storyboard scene, key extremes that define the action for overseas animators. Below are the layouts for Scene 52, shown in storyboard form at bottom right.





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3



4



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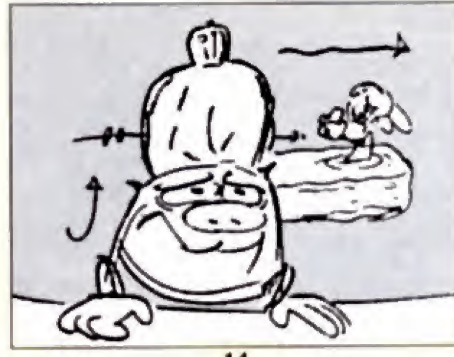
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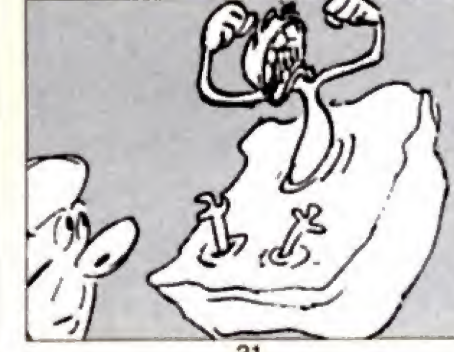
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**THE STORYBOARD** of "Space Madness" by Spumco artists Jim Smith and Chris Reccardi. Though the storyboard is drawn from an approved premise and story outline, in the Spumco system of production this is the stage at which the cartoon is actually "written" by the artists who draw it. Shown above (1-6) is Scene 2, Stimpy's anti-gravity gum; shown middle (7-8) is Scene 24, a pan up Stimpy's space helmet, illustrating its usefulness making toast; and (9-21) Scenes 32 through 52, Ren's anti-gravity bath in which, suffering from the titular "space madness," he imagines his bar of soap is his beloved ice cream bar. "I've had it since I was a kid," he burbles. "How I love to lick your creamy center," and to Stimpy who tries to help him (21), "Why don't you leave me alone!"

drags them into the house and scales them and cleans them and tosses their guts in the sink. And they're laying there flayed open, quivering, looking at each other and saying, 'I think this is going to be a hard sell.' Boy were they mad about that one."

**STIMPY:** "Let's play circus...Look at me, I am a juggler!"

**SVEN:** "And I am a bearded lady!"

**STIMPY:** "And I am a sword swallower...Ahhhhhhughpphlmph."

—Off-screen hijinks, the Kids'll Never Know Division; dialogue cut from "Sven Hoek"

**SVEN HOEK**

★★★

11/92. Directed by John Kricfalusi.

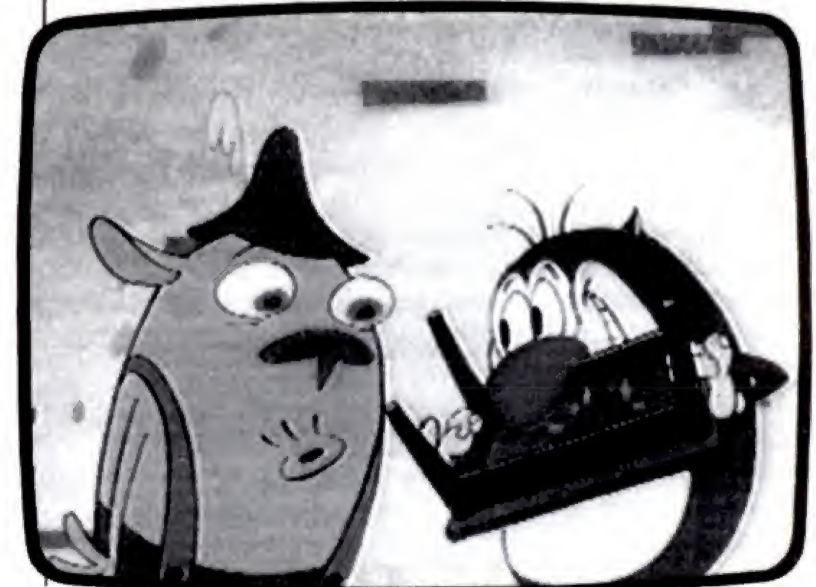
After an extended "hiatus," Ren and Stimpy return to their public in the first episode post-produced by Games Productions, the new Nickelodeon cartoon studio founded after Kricfalusi's ouster from the show. Don't be fooled by Games' awful live-action opening credits, a guy in bad makeup in front of a bad backdrop doing a bad imitation of an accordion player—badly.

Kricfalusi's "Sven Hoek" starts off good and gets even better. Sick of Stimpy's non-stop idiocies and hungry for an intellectual conversation, Ren can't wait for the arrival of his beloved, visiting cousin, Sven. Is it any wonder, then, that when his relative arrives, he turns out to be the asthma-hound Chihuahua version of Stimpy? To Ren's profound chagrin, Sven and Stimpy bond immediately, delighting each other with their collections of bodily effluences and whiling away the hours with repeated rounds of their favorite board game, "Don't Whiz on the Electric Fence." Hold on until after the commercial, when working-man Ren returns home, and launches into an extended monologue describing in graphic detail what he intends to do to the two idiots—a stunning bit of animation by Carbunkle.

The episode is bracketed by two new mock ads: one for Log (featuring a set of gags that Kricfalusi says were rejected from previous Log ads), and another for Gritty Kitty litter (further padded out by a repetition of the Muddy Mudskipper theme sequence from "Stimpy's Big Day"). The show ends with (ta-daah!) the return of the good-bye bumper, in which Ren suggests Stimpy blow himself up like a balloon.

A comparison of the finished "Sven Hoek" with Kricfalusi's original cut shows that, by and large, the editors at Nickelodeon did well by the director. The timing is different, but not to an appreciable degree. Kricfalusi faulted the editing at Games Productions. "And the sound effects are too loud, and the music doesn't match the moods of the scenes. That cartoon was much funnier than what you saw."

Stimpy displays his collection of magic nose goblins for Ren's Swedish cousin in "Sven Hoek," a reprise of the popular first season gag.





Kricfalusi criticized the gratuitous switch to black and white for the PSYCHO riff in "Haunted House," tampering done after he was fired from the show.

**"I like Darrin, he is my friend! I like you and him—he likes me and I like him!! He likes you, I hooooope! I LIKE HIS AUTOGRAPH, IT IS A NICE PICTURE!!!! HE IS NIIIIICCEE!!!"**

—Stimpy likes Darrin from "Mad Dog Hoek"

**HAUNTED HOUSE** ★★

12/92. Directed by Ron Hughart.

**MAD DOG HOEK** ★★

12/92. Directed by Bob Camp.

No groundbreaking animation here, no in-depth character development, just good gags in a couple of funny cartoons. "This looks like a great place to kill 12 minutes," Stimpy rightly says of the "Haunted House." The same, got-nothing-better-to-do sentiment is shared by a lackadaisical, Droopy-like ghost who tries his damndest to scare the two jerks out of their wits and ends up bewailing the difficulties inherent in terrifying the terminally ignorant. On the whole, the episode doesn't hold together—the big gag in the Droopy cartoons was that, for all his moanings, Droopy was impressively effective in whatever he attempted—but the cartoon has its moments.

A simple set-up for Camp's "Mad Dog Hoek:" Ren and Stimpy are tag-team wrestlers, matched up against the Lout Brothers, Lump and Loaf. Ren quickly learns that life is much sweeter on the sidelines. Stimpy can't quite get it into his noggin that all the mangling, mauling and "flying-butt-pliers" is supposed to *hurt*. Ends weird, as Stimpy assays one of those lovely post-match challenge interviews, and turns it into a Dadaistic stream of non-sequiturs, with frazzled animation to match. Bob Camp does the voice of Loaf (or is that Lump?) at the end, spewing out a challenge speech that he and Kricfalusi improvised during the recording session. "It almost killed Bob, screaming that," noted Kricfalusi.

If "Haunted House's" Bloody Head Fairy looks and sounds a little odd, that's because George Liquor was supposed to appear in the role. Nickelodeon put their collective foot down, so Kricfalusi (who laid out the scene with Richard Pursel) instead substituted an image and voice based on the protagonist of Nick's sweetly benign DOUG series. The Gods punish us by granting our wishes.

There is one genuinely botched up sequence in "Haunted House:" an abortive PSYCHO take-off, complete with a shift to a grainy, black-and-white image. "That was really weird," said Kricfalusi. "The black-and-white thing was some kind of an afterthought—somebody did that after it left my hands. The scene wasn't supposed to be that close to PSYCHO—I mean, yeah, it's the shower sequence and the ghost comes up behind the curtain—but the use of black and white distracted from what was going on. There was no out, it was

just black and white for a while and then it stopped. That's what happens when somebody tinkers with somebody else's work."

**GEORGE:** "Note how a smooth butt adds a regal appearance to your show dog...See that?"

**STIMPY:** "But I'm a cat!"

**GEORGE:** "Atta girl, Rex."

—A severe case of cross-communications, from "Dog Show"

**THE BIG BABY SCAM** ★★

12/92. Directed by Vincent Waller.

**DOG SHOW** ★★

12/92. Directed by Chris Reccardi and John Kricfalusi.

Jealous of the favored treatment infants receive, Ren and Stimpy decide to pull "The Big Baby Scam," bribing a pair of tykes to hit the road, then taking their place in the play pen. The crime might work, too, considering that Ren and Stimpy have wound up in the care of the same, suburban couple who had such trouble distinguishing between mice and Chihuahuas in "The Boy Who Cried Rat." Features lots of good shots of Ren and Stimpy doing their best googly-oogly baby impressions—particularly impressive when Dad mock-boxes with Ren (Vincent Waller, who also storyboarded the episode, went overseas to pose out key sequences for the animation house)—and an ending where Ren gets the living crap beat out of him by the two, delinquent kinder (raising serious questions about what Nickelodeon found so distasteful in "Man's Best Friend's" violence).

The name of "Dog Show's" main character is George Liquor. That's L-I-Q-U-O-R, not "Lick 'er," which is what some nervous Nickelodeon execs were said to have feared the audience would think he was saying. In the version aired, the character's last name is bleeped out, while a subtitle created by Kricfalusi to show the correct spelling and defuse the double entendre is electronically removed. Not that "George blank, American!" is any less corrupting—imagine for a second a schoolyard in which kids are discussing what was censored from the previous night's REN & STIMPY. You think "Liquor" will be the worst thing they come up with?

The only other discernable alteration to the version Kricfalusi delivered to Nickelodeon close to three months earlier was some redone artwork to remove sight of George's tailbone during a closeup of his butt (it was supposed to be suggestive of a bobbed tail; Nick thought it was an erection gag. Uhh, that's usually in *front* guys). Beyond that, this episode airs pretty much intact. George Liquor is certain he's got a lock on the grand prize at the all-breed dog show, what with entering both his rare, miniature Great Dane (Ren), and his equally precious Cornish Rex Hound (Stimpy). The judges—Mr. Horse and the William

Ren & Stimpy, eying telltale bubbles in the bath with Dad in "The Big Baby Scam," as the duo take the place of two tykes to get on easy street.



**“The best cartoons that we made were the ones that Nickelodeon hated the most at the storyboard stage. And they never learned.”**

— Creator John Kricfalusi —

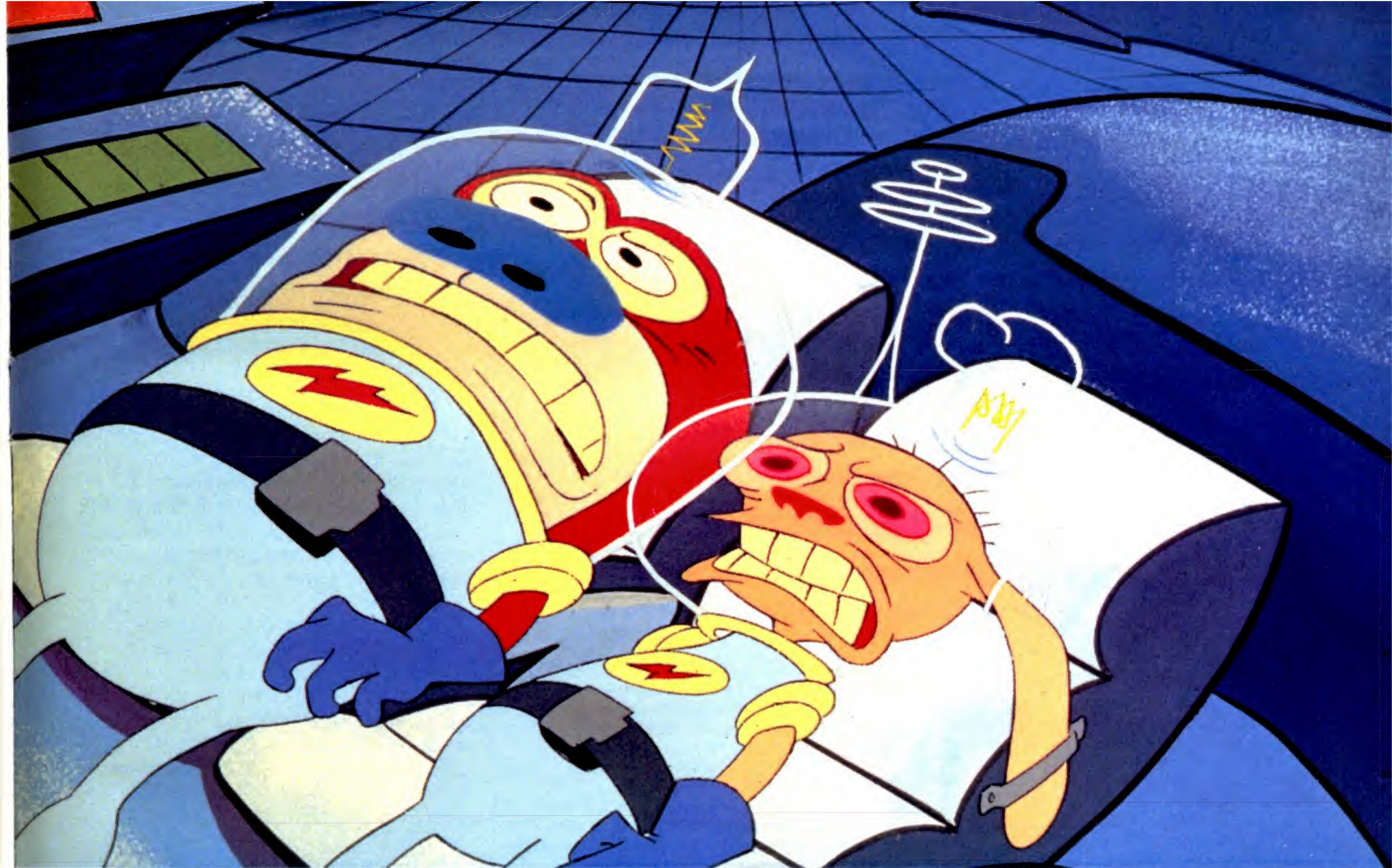
told me, 'This is about mind control. The drawings are too crazy. Ren looks too insane. It's going to scare children.' I had to beg Vanessa. I had to get the other people out of the room to get Vanessa alone—because everybody with her was telling her, 'You've got to get Kricfalusi to throw this out. Don't let him talk you into it. You've got to assert yourself.' She's getting this from her end, from Will McRobb and Mary Harrington. And sure enough, I did talk her into it. I begged her, I literally begged her.

"But they loved ['Space Madness' and 'Stimpy's Invention'] when they saw them [after completion]. Then, during the second season, every time I came up with a new kind of idea, they'd say, 'Why do you always come up with this new stuff? Why can't you do stuff like "Stimpy's Invention"?' I can't drive home that point enough. That the best cartoons that we made, which they agreed were the best we made, were also the ones they hated the most at the storyboard stage. And they never learned from that experience."

**T**he scars only deepened when work began on the second season. Granted, everyone started out with the highest of hopes. "The shows this year are going to kill people," said Camp last August. "There are going to be dead children lying all over the floors of households all over America, because they were over-entertained and their little brains blew out their ears and covered the carpet."

Noted Coffey, as the season started, "We want these shows to be in our library for years and we'll be playing REN & STIMPY for years. So if it takes a little longer to make it, it's worth it to us, 'cause we're in it for the long haul."

Despite such noble sentiments, reality turned out to be far different. According to Kricfalusi, the relationship between Nick and Spumco rarely resembled a comprehensive definition of synergy. Take Coffey's blue-sky portrayal of the story approval process, cited earlier. "Let me give you an example of [Nick story editor Mitchell Kriegman] working with us," said Kricfalusi. "When we started the first series, we had our first meeting—Mitchell and Vanessa and Mary Harrington and Bob



Ren & Stimpy brace for blast-off in the teaser for the Commander Hoek and Stimpy series, used to kick-off outer space adventure in "Space Madness" and "Marooned."

[Camp] and me. I said, 'Here's our idea for the format. We're gonna have these bumpers and the wraparounds, and then we're gonna have the cartoons. And in each cartoon, Ren and Stimpy will be like classic cartoon characters, or classic comedy characters. They'll be in a different situation in each cartoon. In some cartoons, they'll live in a trailer. In other cartoons they'll be in space. They might be cavemen in another cartoon. We'll just have a totally different environment in every cartoon and the thread that will tie the whole thing together will be their personalities.' And here's how Mitchell worked closely with us: he said, 'It won't work.'

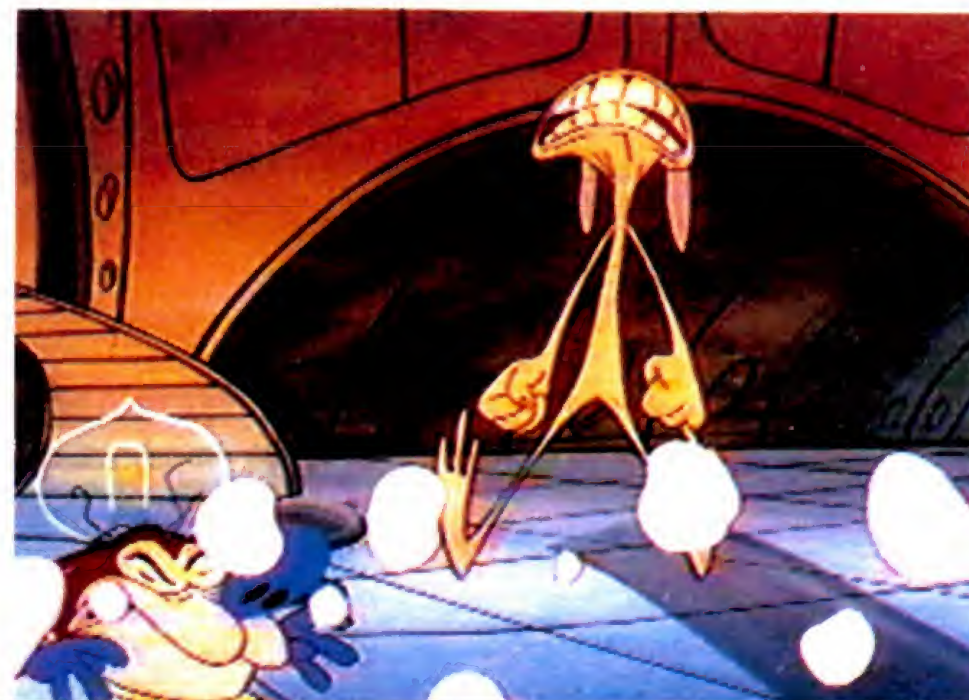
"He said, 'Kids won't be able to understand that. Kids won't be able to follow that. Kids need to have a grip on reality.

They need to have an anchor. I think they should live in the same house every week and, in fact, we should be able to memorize where all the furniture is and what furniture it is and where the windows are.' And he said, 'I think it will be more of a challenge to write stories within a restricted environment, than to open the possibilities up.' And that's when Bob [Camp] flipped out on him."

Camp clearly recalled his reaction. "I said, 'Who do you think you're talking to? I'm not eight. It's more of a challenge to push your head through a concrete wall, too, but I'm not going to do it.' Once we convinced them that it was better to have them living in different situations and doing different things, and they figured out what we meant by that and what we had in

mind, they were real happy with it. It's like the Three Stooges. They're barbers in one thing and the next they're not."

All involved in the production, Kricfalusi included, have conceded that Vanessa Coffey was instrumental in encouraging the development of an appealing, softer side to REN & STIMPY. The director, though, insists that Coffey's usual involvement was far from an activist one. "I just want to be clear about how [Coffey's] role worked," said Kricfalusi. "It wasn't by telling me specific examples of what to do with Ren to make him softer. It would just be, 'Make him softer. Do something that makes us like a part of Ren.' That would be her input. It's almost like saying, 'I helped develop a hit show and my input to the creator was, 'Make me a hit show.'



**SPACE MADNESS** overcomes Ren, who goes completely over the edge at the prospect of a thirty-six year space voyage in the company of Cadet Stimpy. Ranting in the best Fred C. Dobbsian tradition he shouts, "Why don't you just leave me . . . alone!" smashing his anti-gravity bath to droplets for emphasis. Compare to Spumco's design, see page 44.



The birth of Stinky in "Stimpy's First Fart," Spumco's intended Christmas show that Nick retitled "Son of Stimpy" and ran on MTV instead.

Conrad-ish announcer from "Space Madness"—don't quite see it that way, which only makes them prime targets for George's special brand of persuasion. Lotsa good, shirt ripping histrionics from George here, but the acting awards have to go to the miniature poodle who gets a few moving moments to beg for his life before being sacrificed to a bulldog. The poodle's owner, by the way, is a caricature of David Koenigsberg, the "Casanova of Spumco."

Kricfalusi went ballistic when he heard that Baby Scam's communal bath sequence—during which Ren and Stimpy are handed over to Grampa (aka Old Man Hunger)—was modified so that the suspect elder's happy whistle instead comes out as Grieg's ominous *Hall of the Mountain King*, the same music Peter Lorre whistles in *M*. "Ohhh, man!" said Kricfalusi. "We recorded this great old western whistling with Sons of Pioneers backup and everything... They made it evil? Oh, God, it wasn't supposed to be evil, it was supposed to be friendly. Originally, they never wanted the grandpa to be in the bathtub at all. They didn't get it; they didn't want a family bath to begin with. They said, 'Nobody takes a family bath.' And cat's don't talk, either—this is THE REN & STIMPY SHOW. We had huge fights over the family bath and I finally convinced them to let the family bath be and to have Dad hand them over to Grandpa. And what we wanted to do was just leave it up to the audience to wonder what the hell Grandpa was doing there, particularly after we know that Mom doesn't like him. I suggested, 'Why don't we just have him whistling a happy tune so that we know he's not going to do anything harmful to them?' And I went and recorded a really happy, upbeat, country and western, funny thing that made a real great, non-sequitur ending. So now they turn him into a child molester? They fire me for putting bad messages into the cartoons, and they turn him into a child molester! It's unbelievable."

Meanwhile, Kricfalusi will tell you that it isn't just George Liquor's name that Nickelodeon is uncomfortable with. "They just don't like George Liquor, period," he said. "They don't like conflict, period. In fact, they don't like Ren. They don't like it when Ren yells at Stimpy and goes psychotic and when he gets crazed and when he's a real asshole. They hate that."

"Content wise, ["Dog Show"] is no different, wilder or further out than anything we've done before. It's just more new stuff to get mad at. By degree, it's no riskier than any material we've done in any of the other cartoons. It's purely that a bunch of politically-correct women see George Liquor—the ultimate, caricatured, right wing character—and they hate him. They don't see that we're making fun of him. They think we're condoning George Liquor's actions. Basically, they think what's happening in the cartoon is real. And I've been spending two years trying to convince them, 'No, it's not real. It's just a cartoon. Nobody's getting really scared or hurt.'"

REN: "Let's see if I've got this straight: something came out of your butt and it made a sound."

STIMPY: "And it smelled funny."

REN: "You've really lost it this time."

—Major credibility gap, from "Son of Stimpy"

#### SON OF STIMPY

1/93. Directed by John Kricfalusi.

★★

This was supposed to be the REN & STIMPY Christmas Special and, indeed, "Son of Stimpy" has all the tropes: CUs of an impassioned Stimpy insisting, "He's real, he's real, he's real;" a strikingly laid-out montage sequence in which the cat wanders the streets of a barren, snowbound city, and an ending featuring a tearful Christmas Eve reunion. All of which would convince viewers that John K. had sold out big-time, except for the fact that the object of Stimpy's obsessions happens to be Stinky the Fart, who escapes unbidden from Stimpy's butt one day, leaving the befuddled feline with a severe case of empty-nest syndrome (hence the rather cryptic title—the episode was originally called "Stimpy's First Fart" before Nickelodeon got nervous). Ultimately, the short was aired on MTV, not as a segment of the REN & STIMPY SHOW.

Sentimentality collides frequently (and sometimes gratingly) with the patently gross over the course of this half-hour episode, but things are never better than during the opening exchanges between the abandoned Stimpy and a disbelieving Ren, and in those impressively Disneyesque montages. This serves as something of a showcase for actor Billy West, who, aside from Kricfalusi's Ren, does the rest of the episode's voices (and whose sullen "I don't care" for a depressed Stimpy is the perfect evocation of every obstinate 10-year-old who ever walked the Earth).

"[It's] so dripping with melodrama," said Kricfalusi prior to the episode's premiere. "You're going to have a giant lump in your throat when you see it. The painters did a whole new style on it. Rather than what everybody is calling the post-modern style, it's painted more like a Frank Capra movie. It's pretty amazing. Artistically and acting-wise, it's beyond anything we've ever done."

Speaking of taking things one step beyond, a mid-episode mistletoe sequence and a shot during which Ren and Stimpy sing "Memories" upon hearing of Stinky's wedding plans should go a long way toward removing any doubts that what the dog and cat have between them is something more than mere friendship (only a photo of Ren and Stimpy sharing a pitcher of beer with Matt Groening's openly gay Akbar and Jeff could be more definitive). Could the Nickelodeon execs have missed the subtle outing? Doubtful, so kudos to the front office for demonstrating that some remnants of their courage remain.

Searching to find Stinky, his lost son, Stimpy seeks out the advice of his magic nose goblins in Kricfalusi's half-hour epic "Son of Stimpy."



“They fire me for putting bad messages in the cartoons and [in ‘The Big Baby Scam’] they turn grandpa into a child molester!”

— Creator John Kricfalusi —

"For instance, we were doing a cartoon last year called 'Fake Dad,' where Ren is like a Big Brother. He and Stimpy decide that Ren has so much love in him that he needs to share his love with someone less fortunate than himself. So they go down to the Fake Dad headquarters to find an unfortunate youth. And the youth turns out to be little, seven-year-old Kowalski, who's had a little trouble in his past, but everyone figures that Ren is just the man to turn him around. The whole cartoon is about Ren trying to give his love to this kid, who turns out to be seven years old, all right, but he looks like a 36-year-old prison convict. He is a convict, in fact, he's serving a 36 year prison sentence for crimes against humanity. It was a hilarious cartoon, but they didn't get it at Nickelodeon."

"They never got it. They couldn't figure out what a seven-year-old kid was doing in this 40-year-old looking body—he's got a five o'clock shadow and he smokes cigarettes. So they hated that cartoon. The input would be, 'This cartoon is just too harsh. You've got to soften Ren up. Ren is just too mean.' Vanessa had an uneasy feeling but she couldn't put into words what you would need to write into the story to make her happy." Such changes usually resulted in delays in the show's delivery dates, according to Kricfalusi. Coffey declined repeated offers to comment on this and other issues regarding the Spumco firings.

With that kind of relationship, it wasn't surprising that, not far into production for the second season, cracks began to form in the alliance. At Kricfalusi's request, Nickelodeon backed off its original order of 20 new episodes, conceding that 13 episodes were enough to keep the studio busy for the next year. Even so, meetings were held in August to come up with a budget acceptable to all parties.

What didn't help was Nickelodeon's subsequent rejection of one new episode, "Man's Best Friend," for a now-familiar reason. "It's so wild," said Camp, "that Nickelodeon won't show it. It's got a character called George Liquor, who did a couple of cameos last year [he was the Sheriff of Dodge City in 'Robin Hoek' and the



# Ren & Stimpy



## CANADIAN CARBUNKLE

*Kricfalusi sings the praises of Carbunkle Cartoons, the show's best animators.*

By Dan Persons

While praises have been duly allotted to the people at Spumco and Nickelodeon for THE REN & STIMPY SHOW, John Kricfalusi noted that there's one group of players whose invaluable contributions have regularly gone unnoticed: the artists of Carbunkle Cartoons, the Canadian production house founded by director Bob Jacques and animator Kelly Armstrong. According to Kricfalusi, what makes Carbunkle's work stand out is the level to which the company's artists render unnecessary the safeguards built into the Spumco animation system.

"The reason we do the layouts here—the poses and the expressions—is that it's a system that's designed to be foolproof against bad overseas animation," said Kricfalusi. "If we do all the expressions and poses, that means there will be acting in the cartoon. We figured that if we held the layout poses and the expressions on the screen long enough, and the expressions matched the dialogue, then it wouldn't matter if the animation was bad. Normally, when we send stuff overseas, we don't expect the animation to be any good.

"We were lucky we found Carbunkle," said Kricfalusi. "Bob Jacques [pronounced Jakes] is an old friend of mine, and he actually helped me design the foolproof system for overseas. So when he started animating, using our system, he did something we didn't expect: he plussed it. His animation made our acting way better, because he animated it

beautifully. He adds subtle nuances within the acting: little looks to camera and things to make the acting more rich.

"Kelly Armstrong is the wildest animator alive," said Kricfalusi. "She's wilder than I am. In 'Stimpy's Invention,' there's a scene where Ren's in the Sta-Put Socks and he's about to flip out—his hands are reached out to Stimpy's throat, then he falls over and starts contorting, having an epileptic seizure. We did maybe two poses on that of him twisting around. But Kelly took it ten steps further: she had him twirling around like a knotted rope, did all this wild stuff that there's no way we could put in the layouts—we'd have to animate the scene to do that.

"In our best episodes—like 'Man's Best Friend,' or 'Space Madness' [all of which were animated by Carbunkle]—the great animation hit another level that we couldn't do in some of the other cartoons.

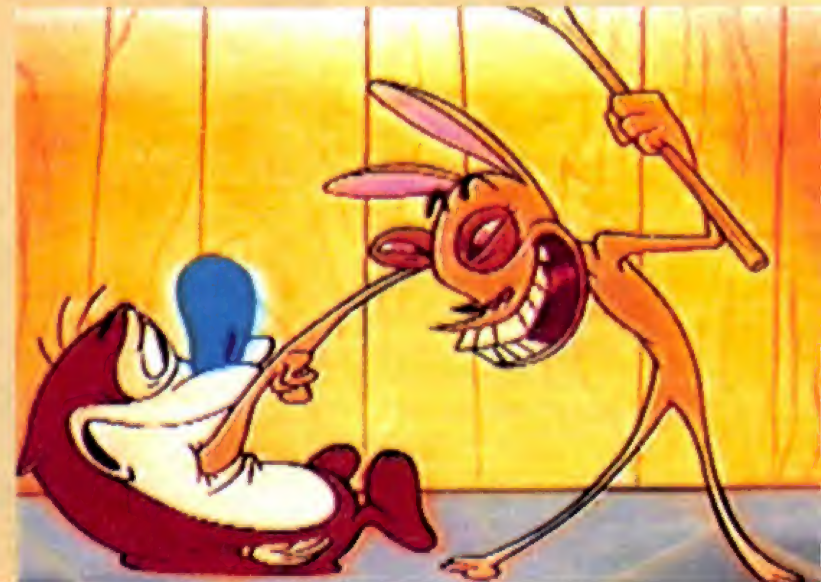
"What I like about when [Carbunkle does] good animation is that it's beautiful movement—it's kind of this odd style of...I don't know what you'd call it...beautiful ugly? It's ugliness done beautifully. When Ren does these wild expressions and goes psychotic and everything, the drawings are very scary and weird and odd. Yet they animate them with such fluidity, with such grace, that to me, when they do it, it turns the stuff into art.

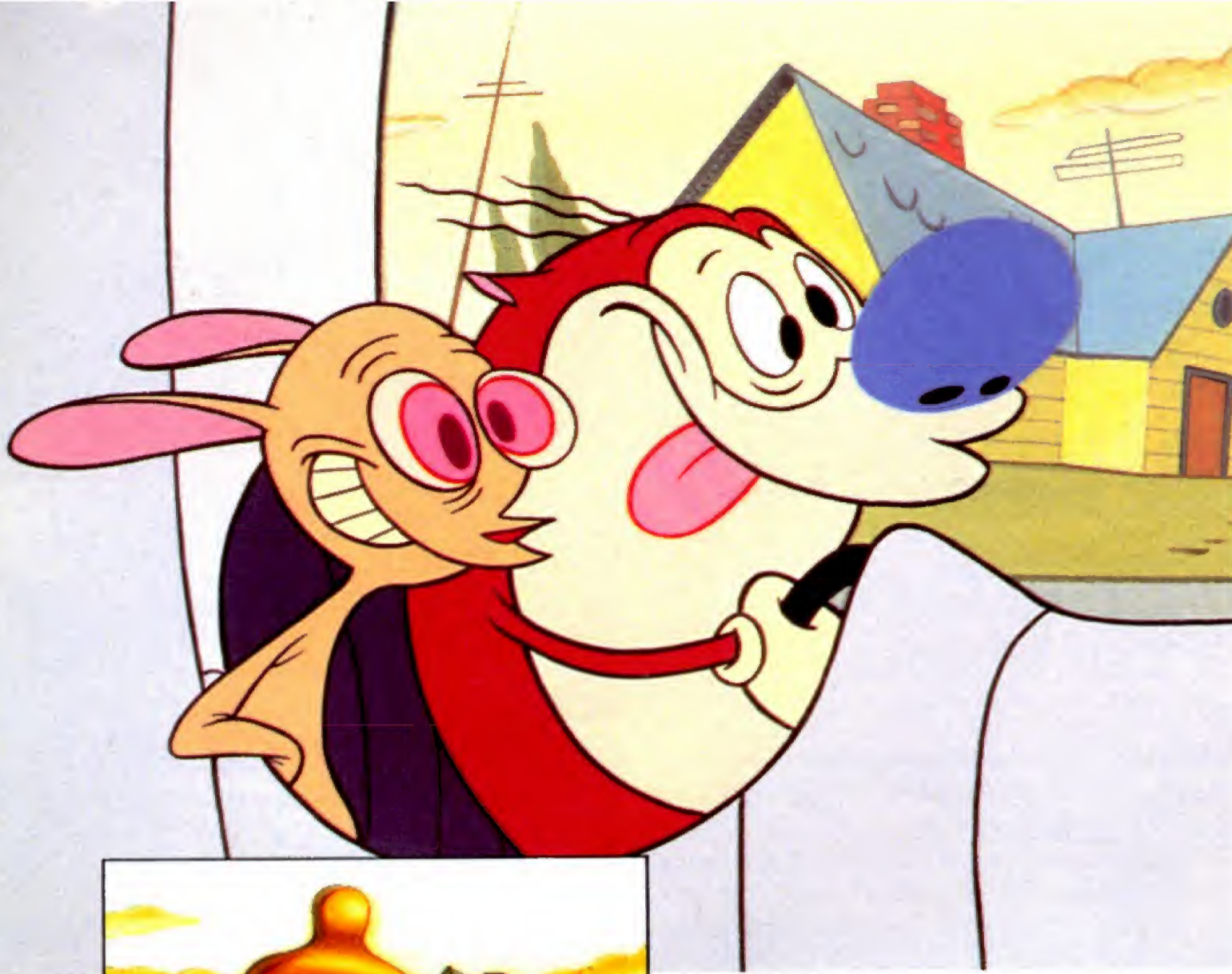
"Beautiful-ugly: it's a new style. Usually ugly stuff is just ugly, and you might laugh at it because it's ugly. But what Carbunkle does is to beautify the ugliness." □



Below: Carbunkle's animation for the banned episode "Man's Best Friend." Left: George Liquor adopts Ren & Stimpy as pets, taunting Ren for liking things soft. Middle: Pushed too far, Ren bludgeons his master with a rowing oar. Right: Ren taunts Stimpy for the collaborator that he is, "You're next, Mr. Doggie Treats!"

Above: "Son of Stimpy" art by Carbunkle's Bob Jacques and Kelly Armstrong. 1: Stimpy braves the "Naked City" to find his son. 2: In the city Stinky has his life threatened by mean bums with matches. 3: Reunited at last, Stimpy and Stinky are overjoyed. 4: Stinky proudly introduces his fiancée, Laura, a rotting fish.





**“Maybe [Nickelodeon] got tired of arguing. Everything was a fight. John did argue for a lot on the show, but look at the results.”**

**- Artist Eddie Fitzgerald -**

the half-hour intended for the banned “Man’s Best Friend.” The fourth week saw a repeat running instead of the scheduled show, even though, according to Fitzgerald, Nickelodeon had the completed episode, “Dog Show,” in their possession. “They okayed the storyboard, and they okayed the script outline,” said Fitzgerald. “It’s just that when they saw it, they changed their mind. Of course, that just makes John look even further behind.” (A representative for Nickelodeon said “Man’s Best Friend,” “Dog Show” and “Powdered Toast Man” remain in the Ren & Stimpy rotation. At press time, “Powdered Toast Man” had aired twice and “Dog Show” once.)

**T**he final split came at the end of September, announced with a judiciously worded press release announcing the “reorganization” of production responsibilities for the show. Kricfalusi was to “turn over the direct day-to-day production responsibilities of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW to Nickelodeon and act as consultant.” Bob Camp would leave Spumco and take over the show as “head” of a studio that Nickelodeon planned to open in-house. The exact difficulties that led to the rift were not spelled out.

According to Kricfalusi, if the Nick execs were upset over delayed delivery dates and expanding budgets, they had only themselves to blame. “I have the ability to deliver episodes on time. They don’t have the ability to deliver episodes on time. They wouldn’t let us deliver them on time. Every time we’d make a suggestion on how to make a schedule and budget realis-



The American Dream: Ren & Stimpy hit the road in “Rubber Nipple Salesmen,” hawking goods from a suitably decorated Good Humor Truck (inset).

Fitzgerald. “I asked John about it, ‘What were you thinking there, because that makes people mad, to see something like that?’ And he said, and I believe it, that he just wanted to do something outrageous and that was a convenient thing to do, since Powdered Toast Man was in the White House. He never intended it to be a slur on that sort of thing. John and I have had lots of conversations about politics and everything and he doesn’t have a political position.”

Said Kricfalusi of three complaints reportedly lodged with the FCC about the episode, “Three people complained and from what I’m hearing, right now, thousands of people are complaining about the show being killed, or taken away from us. It’s pretty odd to me that three people can complain and they can take a show off the air, but they’re not afraid of two million people.”

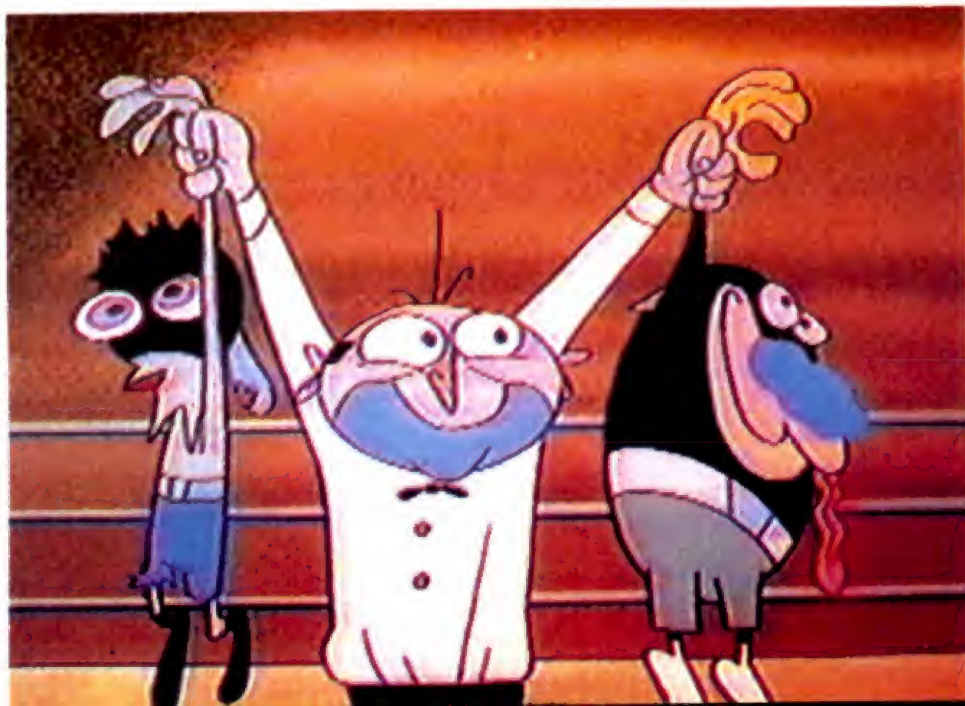
The season was downhill from there. The second week the series’ pilot had “Big House Blues” trotted out to fill in a gap in

Higher Mammal and with a territorial hang-up about garbage dumpsters in ‘The Boy Who Cried Rat’]. This is his own cartoon. He brings Ren and Stimpy home from the pet store and he teaches them ‘love through discipline.’ Nickelodeon decided it was a little too rough to run.”

Things didn’t improve with the mid-August debut of the second season. Almost immediately, damage control had to be called in to handle viewer complaints over one cartoon, “Powdered Toast Man,” in which the titular superhero, finding himself in the White House’s Oval Office, decides to warm the place up by throwing the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Bill of Rights* on the fire. “Nothing grosses me out, but that bothered me a bit,” admitted

#### MAD DOG HOEK

pokes fun at wrestling with the titular Ren tag-teamed with pal Stimpy as Killer Kadogen (right), the winners in their bout with Lout brothers, Lump and Loaf. Far Right: The ringside announcer in casual attire. Stimpy never quite gets it into his noggin that all the mangling, mauling and “flying-buttpliers” should hurt.



tically, they didn't let us do it. Or they'd agree and, weeks down the line, change their minds."

What could have been done to meet the network's requirements? According to Kricfalusi, "Do some simpler stories." And Kricfalusi said he pitched that solution to little avail. "But the only ones they would buy would be the complex stories—which, creatively, is great, to me. I love them like that. I love experimenting and doing different stuff, but it's a television show. You're not going to make your schedules if you keep doing everything as an experiment... I kept browbeating them all through the story stage. 'You gotta let us do this, you gotta let us do this. We're going over schedule now just trying to get these stories approved.' I finally browbeat them enough to let us do five [including 'In the Army,' 'Out West' and 'Monkey See, Monkey Don't']".

"They read the stories and they said, 'These sound like cheaters. These sound like typical TINY TOONS or Hanna-Barbera cartoons.' I said, 'Yes, they are. They're typical cartoons. That's exactly what they are! But believe me, if we get Bob [Camp] to storyboard these, they will be funny. It won't matter that they don't have stories, or that they don't have conflict. They'll just be visual gags. He'll draw them funny and the kids will like it.'

"Finally, I convinced them. Bob did the first storyboard—he did 'In the Army'—and they loved it, because Bob draws great and he draws really funny. They looked at it and all of a sudden they thought, 'Wow, this is great! Let's do more like this.' I said, 'It's too late! You've made all your approvals of which stories you're going to go with and which you aren't, and most of them are really hard to produce.'"

Speculated Fitzgerald about the Nickelodeon/Spumco split, "Maybe the whole thing about deadlines has nothing to do with the real reason. The real reason is just that they got tired of arguing about lots of little things on the show, where everything was a fight and this is their way of stopping that. John did argue for an awful lot on the show, but look at the results."

At the time of the break, two episodes were nearing completion: "Sven Hoek," about a visit from Ren's cousin and a Christmas story, "Stimp's First Fart," about ...well...you know. While most of what was left to do on those episodes was post-production, Kricfalusi noted that, whatever else happens, he wouldn't be overseeing the process. "I have no say in the matter," he said. "The last contact I had was with Vanessa, who promised me I could finish 'Sven Hoek,' which I was going to do for free, just to protect it. I was going to finish the show with her watching me. We were also going to do a Christmas record. This was my last contact with her. I sang her a couple of songs we wrote for the



Ren & Stimpy disguise themselves as zoo animals in "Monkey See, Monkey Don't," and learn that life in a cage isn't the "easy street" they imagined.

**"No longer are we lowly housepets. We've climbed the evolutionary ladder, we've been accepted into the world of higher mammals. We've evolved!"**

—A move to the monkey cage does wonders for Ren's morale, from "Monkey See, Monkey Don't."

### MONKEY SEE, MONKEY DON'T ★

2/93. Directed by Bob Camp.

"It's the worst Ren & Stimpy cartoon ever made," said John Kricfalusi of "Monkey See, Monkey Don't." Well, no, not quite—"The Littlest Giant" still holds that dubious honor (and, since "Monkey See..." was under Bob Camp's direction, John may be just a tad biased). On the other hand, the boundaries sure aren't being stretched in this particular entry, which started life as a "cheater" cartoon and through its running length rarely manages to rise above that distinction.

Not having learned their lesson from "The Big Baby Scam," Ren and Stimpy masquerade as monkeys to get their share of the goodies humans dispense to the inhabitants of the local zoo. Instead, they get the ecstatic honor of grooming their cellmate, Stinky the Chimp, while chowing down on braised fish heads and spoiled banana peels. The good parts are actually quite good—including an opening sequence in which an elephant nearly sucks up a child's arm, along with a bag of peanuts, and a shot where Stinky gets to strut his stuff before an appreciative audience. But there's a level of weirdness missing from this outing, an edgy strangeness that elevated the other REN & STIMPY "cheaters" from their formulaic plots. Think of the dinner-gowned announcer of "Mad Dog Hoek," or the live coal pit of "The Big Baby Scam." The closest "Monkey See..." can manage is to conjure up an ending reminiscent of "Untamed World"—complete with a Stimpypottamus and symbiotic Ren-bird. Good, but too little, too late.

This is the first REN & STIMPY episode to credit Billy West with the voice of Ren Hoek (previously, he filled in for John Kricfalusi on the "Blow Yourself Up Like a Balloon" goodbye bumper). He comes about as close as anyone could to the sound, but it's like listening to the new Bugs Bunny after becoming accustomed to Mel Blanc. For better or worse, John made Ren his own.

"Fake Dad" was also supposed to be aired in tandem with this episode (trimmed down from its planned, half-hour length). Instead, we got the newly revised (and pointedly repatriated) "Powdered Toast Man." If this is an example of REN & STIMPY's "new direction," post-Kricfalusi, then dark times may indeed be ahead. The Pope has become "The Funny Little Guy with the Pointed Hat," dialogue has been changed, and, worse, the controversy over P.T.M. burning the Constitution has been glossed over by simply clipping out the offending cutaway. Brilliant work,

guys. Now the cartoon has no closing gag at all! I shudder to think what's being done to "Man's Best Friend."

Kowalski: "Daddy!"

Ren: "I'm not your dad. I'm only your fake dad. And only for this weekend."

Stimp: "Be nice to the product of your loins!"

Ren: "My fake loins..."

—Family Values' last gasp, from "Fake Dad."

### FAKE DAD ★

2/93. Directed by John Kricfalusi & Jim Smith.

This was cut by Nickelodeon from its planned half-hour length to 12 minutes. It's a mess. The concept has merit: Ren and Stimpy decide to become fake Dads, volunteering to share their love, home and hearth with some fatherless, impoverished waif. What they wind up with—courtesy of the Fake Dad organization—is Kowalski, a hulking, pre-verbal brute with a singularly unique philosophy of life: if it moves, crush it; if it doesn't move, crush it anyway.

There were glimmers of inspiration throughout the cartoon: an edgy, nuclear family tableau featuring a toothily grinning Ren with a big bowl of frosting on his lap; the revelation that Kowalski's favorite sandwich is meat on meat, sided with a tall, frosty glass of meat. But the episode doesn't hold together—the animation lacks the level of quality seen in previous installments, while the cutting ranges from adequate to nearly incomprehensible.

Given the chance, Kowalski could actually grow on you (when he croons "Baby Loves Daddy," in a voice that seems to rise from the depths of his bowels—if not from the very pit of Hell itself—your heart just about melts). The cartoon is a failure, but the character, in his own Neanderthal way, charms. Dare we hope for a return engagement?

"That's going to be a real tough one for them to put together in post-production," noted Kricfalusi, prior to its airing. "The lead character [Kowalski] doesn't talk, or just barely talks. He relates most of his emotions through the facial expressions and guttural noises that he makes—grunting and moaning and stuff. All those little moans, they can't be written down like words, so when we recorded them, I had to figure out some way to let the other artists know which grunt goes with which picture. It'll be really easy to make mistakes on that."

Aside from a few key layouts done at Spumco, Games Productions had layout control over this cartoon. "There isn't the quality control that we had," said Rich Pursel. "John used to go through all the layouts and make fixes here and there, and I'm sure that things are just going to slide and there'll be more problems with theirs." As self-

Kowalski embraces Ren, his new big brother in this layout drawing from "Fake Dad," a half-hour show Nick planned to slash to just 12 minutes.





Ren's had about all he can stand, being a foster parent to Kowalski, a layout drawing from "Fake Dad" not likely to make it into the final cartoon.

serving as the statement may be, the on-screen evidence suggests that it's not far from the truth.

## Guest Shots

### THE SIMPSONS: "BROTHER FROM THE SAME PLANET"

2/93. Directed by Jeff Lynch.

★★★

In the midst of an especially surreal episode (complete with pre-teen BARTON FINK fans and an exploding nun), Ren and Stimpy show up on a projection TV, enacting a dinner-table exchange that's a handy spoof of a typical Kricfalusi gross-out gag. THE SIMPSONS' animators come within reasonable striking distance of the Spumco animation style, even managing to work in an overexaggerated eye-take that's probably the most radical thing the Fox Network has ever broadcast. A standout episode already, it goes over the brink with the unexpected cameo (done with the permission of Nickelodeon).

## In Production

The following episodes are in post-production and will air before the end of the season, according to Nickelodeon.

### THE CAT THAT LAID THE GOLDEN HAIRBALL

The market for hairballs explodes, and Ren puts Stimpy on a production line schedule—an increasingly difficult task as Stimpy licks both himself and Ren bare, and is forced to take tongue to a guy named Bubba to carry on. Boarded by Vincent Waller at Spumco, to be laid out at Games.

### THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Ren and Stimpy go camping. Ren is so inexperienced that he doesn't know how to build a fire; Stimpy helps out by demonstrating how to get things going by rubbing two squirrels together. Storyboard was completed at Spumco—deadlines at that point were so tight that there was some talk of having the boards laid out and animated overseas. The situation may now have changed over at Games, where Peter Avanzino may direct.

### KILTED YAKSMEN

Ren and Stimpy, as Royal Canadian Mounted Yaksmen, are assigned the daunting task of finding new deposits of Canada's most precious resource—a substance we've promised not to reveal, except to assure everyone that the Canadian Trade Association will not be pleased. Layouts were completed at Spumco, animation will be done by Rough Draft Korea. "That's almost an undirected show," said Rich Pursel. "Chris Reccardi did the storyboard originally, and then he

was laid off here and was rehired over at the new place. I imagine he's probably in charge of it again, but Mike Fontanelli had a hand in overseeing it here. It's one of those that's been passed around."

### STIMPY'S FAN CLUB

Stimpy, in attempting to soothe Ren's jealousy over the volume of mail the cat receives, places the Chihuahua in charge of his fan club. Needless to say, Ren doesn't quite answer the letters with the same loving affability that Stimpy provides. Boarded at Spumco, to be laid out at Games.

### UNTAMED WORLD 2: LAIR OF THE LUMMOX

Marlin Hoek and Stimpy go after the wily lummoX. A half-hour episode, boarded at Spumco by Jim Smith, laid out at Games.

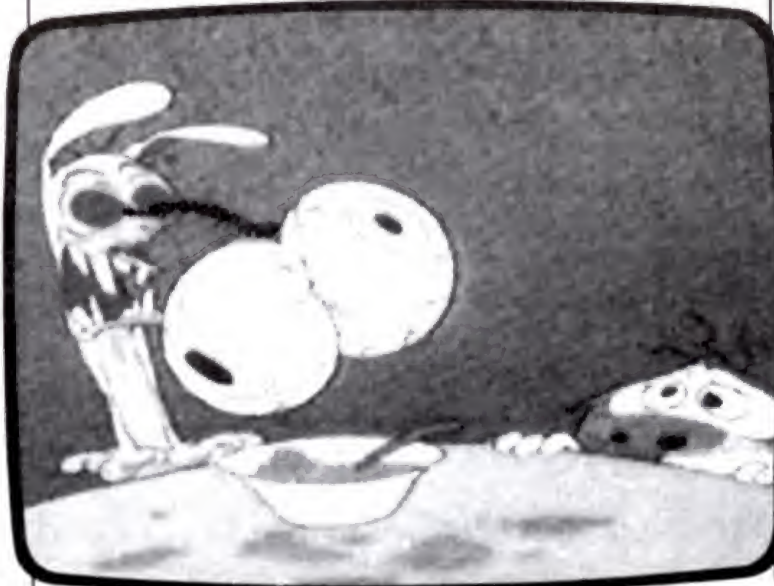
### VISIT TO ANTHONY

"Dear Ren and Stimpy: Hi, my name is Anthony and I live in the United States of America. Please come and visit me whenever you're in our country, and bring your costumes." Spumco's first fan letter, received two days after the premiere of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW, fueled a story in which Ren and Stimpy travel from distant climes of Hollywood, Yugoslavia to the home of young Anthony, a confirmed fan. There, they discover the costs of living up to a child's expectations, especially one so young that he can't yet countenance the notion that his idols would have bodily functions or be incapable of standing up the school bully. Boarded at Spumco, to be laid out at Games. If the twilight encounter between Ren and Stimpy and Anthony's stern, cartoon-hating father (a character based partly on Kricfalusi's own dad) is handled with one-third the facility that Kricfalusi used to describe it, this may still end up to be one hell of a cartoon.

If there's any story that the Spumco staffers mourn losing, this is it. "It was going to be one of the most intense Ren and Stimpy cartoons to date," said Rich Pursel. "I was told that the more difficult scenes, the heavy acting scenes, were given to the best artists over [at Games]. Hopefully, the majority of the show will be drawn well, but based on what they did to 'Sven Hoek,' I'm sure that the music won't fit the mood and the sound effects will be ill-placed. That's ultimately what's sad about the loss of 'Visit To Anthony.'"

Said Kricfalusi, "The only guys that could draw Dad were Jim [Smith] and me. This was the hardest character we'd ever drawn. Even Anthony was hard, because he was based on a real, human kid, he wasn't completely a cartoon character. If you could manage to draw [Dad's] construction, then you've got to do all this killer action, and the acting is the hardest thing in REN & STIMPY... What we did with 'Stimpy's Invention'—lots of subtle expressions and things

Ren & Stimpy make a guest appearance on Fox's THE SIMPSONS, with Ren doing an exaggerated bug-eyed reaction, one of Kricfalusi's hallmarks.



**“This is a real tough show to do. There's so much attention to detail and attention to content and story. It's all orchestrated.”**

— Artist Bob Camp —

Christmas record that she loved. She promised me I could finish 'Sven Hoek.' She offered to let Nickelodeon pay for my vacation. I'm going to take my first vacation since we started REN & STIMPY. I said, 'Well, instead of paying for my vacation, why don't you pay for all the people I had to lay off?'

"After she promised I could finish 'Sven Hoek,' the next I heard was that they had gone in and cut it themselves, and I haven't heard anything directly from Nickelodeon. But there's nothing surprising about that. It's just another in a long line of promises that were reneged on later."

**D**ue to the break, Kricfalusi has been forced to lay off between 25 and 30 of his Spumco staffers.

About half that number joined Camp at the new studio. The rest are seeking to ply their trade at other animation houses. Given the still-growing popularity of the show, and the sometimes intense loyalty many Kricfalusi employees exhibit for their leader, this is a state of affairs that few of them relish. "Most studios don't want you to be original with anything," said one staffer. "As a matter of fact, you can get kicked out. If you get a reputation in this industry for being original, then you may as well learn another profession. You get known as a pariah and an outcast. John wanted the very opposite."

If there's anything that all can agree on, it's that Bob Camp, who's now the only original Spumco Big Shot still involved with day-to-day production responsibilities on the show, has his work cut out for him. Before the break, Camp readily admitted to the complexities inherent in the REN & STIMPY concept. "This is a real tough show to do," said Camp. "There's so much attention to detail and so much attention to content and story. It's not just enough to have a background—the colors in the background have to convey a special mood based upon the storytelling and the expression in the characters' faces and the build of the cartoon. It's all orchestrated. It's as complicated as the most complicated music that's been orchestrated by a composer. It's millions of things playing towards an end. That's why I think they hold up to repeated



# ART CLASS

After the demise of Spumco's beloved REN & STIMPY SHOW, the artists bravely move ahead, conquering new frontiers. Here we get a glimpse at Spumco's drawing classes where artists grow ever stronger under the patient leadership of Jim Smith, the world's most manly cartoonist. Smith points out the subtler anatomical aspects of manly head structure, fondling a bust of Hollywood's most manly actor, Kirk Douglas.

Shown below:

- 1) Smith insists that on a *real* man's head, the top of the skull to the chin is divisible by 1/3 the length of the neck tendons laid end to end.
- 2) Spumco's art classes illustrate difficult concepts by using the "contrasts by comparisons" technique. Here, Smith *compares* the skull structure of wimpy cartoonist, Eddie Fitzgerald, to that of the Greek proportions of Douglas. The Spumco students quickly note the deficiencies of the cartoonist's head by *contrast* with perfection. (Note how the model valiantly tries to "make a chin," but the keen eyes of Smith's students are not fooled.)

3) A serious man, Smith sneers his disapproval at the cameraman disrupting his vital lessons.

4) Uh oh. The teacher discovers a student who's not listening.

5) Discipline can be quite severe at Spumco, as Jordan Reichek, well-known troublemaker can attest.

6) Smith tempers his discipline with reward for work well done. Fitzgerald bursts with glee as the proud teacher gives his production assistant Sara Haliburton, first prize for the best drawing.



Spumco partner Jim Smith conducts a class in life drawing. Students are (clockwise in 1, from Smith) Charlie Bean, Stephanie Rabinowitz, Jordan Reichek, Eddie Fitzgerald, Vincent Waller, Richard Pursel, Joe Orrantia, Carey Yost.

1

2

3



4



5



6



that weren't on the storyboard—multiply that by 20, with much harder characters to draw and a much more subtle storyline, and that was 'Visit To Anthony.' This was all human drama. This wasn't a slapstick cartoon, this was an all-acting cartoon, an intense melodrama.

"Here's the ironic thing about this: the idea was a Spumco-originated idea. I called Nickelodeon, I pitched it to them. They were a little unsure at first, it had never been done before. They finally said, 'All right, let's do it.' They got excited when I started pitching the story to them, and they planned this whole publicity thing. We called Anthony. We flew him out to Los Angeles, took him to Disneyland and everything. We took a bunch of photos of us beating the crap out of him, and we recorded his voice. We actually got him to do the voice—it's really a first. So now, they *have* to do it, but the problem is they *can't* do it...It was going to be our best one, we were really jazzed about it."

## Outer Limits

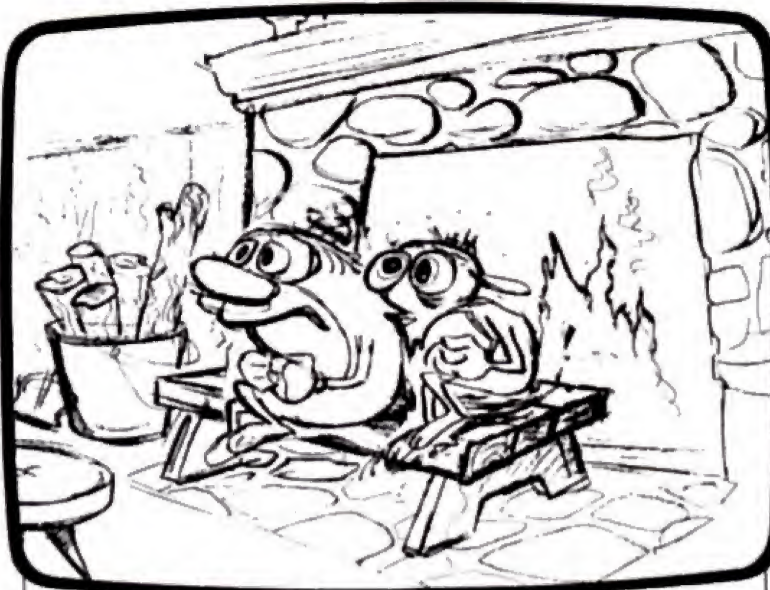
### REN'S BAD HABITS

"At the beginning of the second season," said Kricfalusi, "they were saying, 'Y'know, John. We really love the show and you've done a great job and everything, but we want to lose all the gross stuff.' 'In fact,' I said, 'we should do more gross stuff. We don't do enough of it. Look, maybe if I take some gross stuff out of some of the stories, let me do a couple where that's all they are, just solid gross stuff. Just let's see how gross we can get. We won't do shit or anything like that, we'll do stuff that you can do but just make it as disgusting as possible. The audience will love it. You watch the ratings on these.'"

The first of the two proposed cartoons was "Ren's Bad Habits." Ren and Stimpy resolve to modify their disgusting proclivities—problem is: all of Stimpy's solutions for the attitudinally correct disposal of boogers, loogies, scabs and hairballs turn out to be more gross than the purely human habits that are being replaced. The episode was to end with a production number that would have rivaled *The Lord Loves a Hangin'*—an entire freeway full of motorists indulging their worst habits while singing *Nobody Can See Me In My Car*. Nickelodeon approved this one, but it was eventually sacrificed in the Kricfalusi-requested cutback from 20 episodes to 13. The network probably didn't consider it a big loss.

"They hated that one," said Kricfalusi. "I don't know what it is. All their other shows are full of booger and fart jokes. Whenever we do it, we always do a clever twist on it; we don't just show a booger, we say something about it, we do something, it's clever. Whenever you do something cleverly they hate it...It's too honest, that's what it is. They don't like it when we get too honest. That was a pure, honest cartoon—it was like, 'Hey, we're admitting it. All of us do this.'"

Anthony begs Ren to make his eyes bug out, with the veins popping, where "you look all ugly and everything," a "Visit to Anthony" storyboard.



Ren & Stimpy huddle for warmth in Dad's den in this layout drawing for "A Visit to Anthony," one of the most complex shows Nick has to finish.

### ONWARD AND UPWARD

"Onward and Upward," Kricfalusi's second proposed gross-out fest was rejected by Nick out of hand. Ren and Stimpy decide to upgrade their living environment, moving from lower-class accommodations inside a bum's mouth to more cushier digs: a spittoon. Would have featured an expectoration montage, a classy dining table scene within a hail of goobers, and a bathtub featuring hot and cold running...Oh, screw this. I'm about to sit down for dinner...

## The Twilight Zone

The fate of the following episodes is unknown. All were in production at Spumco before Nickelodeon fired Kricfalusi late last year.

### A YARD TOO FAR

In order to inspire the creation of simpler storylines, Kricfalusi showed his staff a string of old Hanna-Barbera cartoons. This is their revenge. With a plotline loosely based on the first Yogi Bear cartoon, "Pie Pirates," "A Yard Too Far" has Ren and Stimpy struggling to get across a yard and to a steaming plate of hog jowls, with an attack baboon serving as their formidable adversary (it was originally supposed to be a delicious "hair pie" on the windowsill, but even the Spumco Big Shots knew that Nickelodeon wouldn't sit still for that one). "That cartoon was planned as a ripoff," said Kricfalusi. "to be real simple and to fool Nickelodeon into believing that it was a real cartoon." Outlined at Spumco, to be boarded and laid out at Games (possibly by Camp).

### NO PANTS TODAY, OR STIMPY: THAT DIRTY, LITTLE NAKED BOY

Stimpy awakens one morning with an irrational fear of his nakedness. Despite Ren's insistence that cats don't need clothes, Stimpy becomes obsessed with the need for pants and is subsequently booted out into a world that is just as inexplicably repulsed by the sight of a "naked" animal. Meant as a swipe at the current trend of dressing previously unclothed cartoon characters, this episode was outlined at Spumco and is being boarded and laid out at Games, but likely without a planned sequence featuring Victor—the bully from "Visit To Anthony"—and his father (Kricfalusi claimed that Nickelodeon suggested a brutish father-and-son team be replaced with a pair of giraffes. "Is that some thinking, or what?" said the director).

### TO SALVE OR NOT TO SALVE

The inverse of "Rubber Nipple Salesmen." Ren has his work set out for him when he tries to prevent Stimpy from caving in to the persistent attentions of a salve salesman. In outline stage at Spumco, this may be held for the third season—though you likely won't see the proposed sequence in which salve is proven to be the perfect toilet

paper.

### REN'S PECS

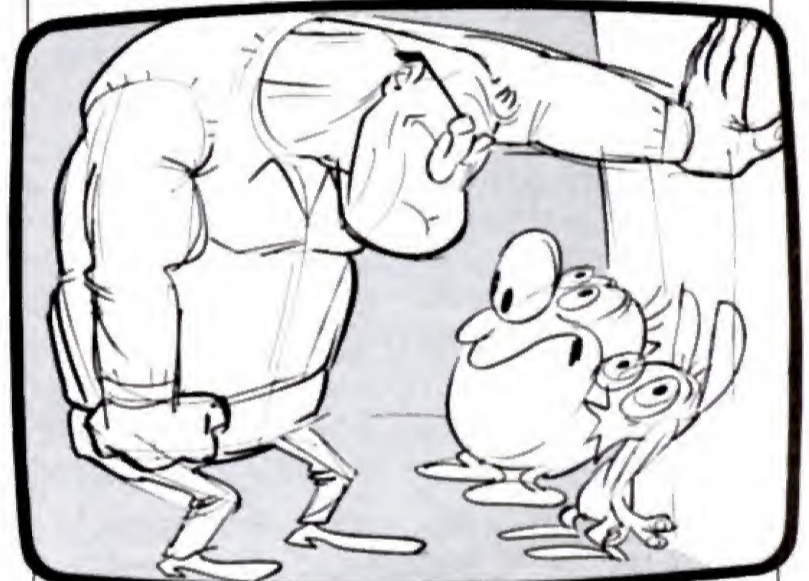
Ren gets sand kicked in his face, and is advised by Charles Atlas about the possibility of a butt muscle transplant to give the Chihuahua the huge pectoral muscles he has prayed for. Stimpy serves as willing donor; Ren moves on to fame and fortune in Hollywood (California or Yugoslavia?). "That was a real heartwarming story," said Kricfalusi. Plot approved by Nickelodeon, but not yet scheduled for production.

### THE BIG SWITCH

Ren and Stimpy change places, Ren discovering the difficulties in being a brainless idiot, Stimpy trying his best to become a psychotic asshole. "You ever notice that in sitcoms they have about five plots, and every sitcom uses them over and over again?" said Kricfalusi. "There's the one where the twin cousin shows up, and then there's the one where the husband and wife get into the fight about whose job in life is harder. You've seen that a million times. Well, I wanted to do it with Ren and Stimpy." Plot approved by Nickelodeon.

### THE CELLULETTES

Stimpy runs away from home to fulfill his greatest ambition: to become a lead singer in a girl group. He joins the Cellulettes, and in the brief span of his career arc (very brief, like between nine and ten a.m.) he manages to clock in with several



Encountering Anthony's Dad in "A Visit to Anthony," a layout drawing for a sequence not likely to make Nick's revision of Spumco's work.

mega-hits, including "The Leg-Jelly Jump" and "My Blue Chihuahua." This proposed episode was written by Elinor Blake. Rock Producer Phil Spector would have performed the voice of the Cellulettes manager Ernie Volva. "Nickelodeon loved that cartoon," said Kricfalusi. "That was a real woman's point-of-view. In fact, Elinor used to be a member of the Pussywillows, a New York band, like a '60s girl group. She had actually sung with the Ronettes and stuff, so it was from a real, girl-singer's point-of-view."

### HILLBILLY REN

A feud there was, between Ren and Stimpy and Corn Liquor (George Liquor's cousin). Features a mid-episode break for a bit of moonlight spooning with Corn's two fecond daughters, during which Ren somehow manages to plant a Big Wet One on Stimpy's butt (he eventually is forced into a shotgun wedding with the gluteal region). "We love the hillbilly story," Kricfalusi reported Nickelodeon telling him, "but lose the guns. You can still have them feud." They didn't like the butt jokes, either—urging that the gags be redirected to Stimpy's nose. "They bugged it up so badly that I just threw it out," said Kricfalusi.

**“They have not turned the show over to [Bob Camp. Vanessa Coffey is] the producer, the boss. She turned it over to herself.”**

**— Creator John Kricfalusi —**

viewings. Can you imagine any other cartoons being watched the way these episodes have?”

Others, though, are not as sure that Camp will be able to maintain the same level of quality and invention, now that Nick has forsaken its original desire for innovation in favor of the “let’s reap them ancillary marketing bucks” approach. “Unfortunately,” said one Spumco artist, “Nickelodeon has—I don’t know how many—approximately five people, who also have a lot of input into the art decisions and only one of them is an artist. So [Camp’s] going to have to sit in on a committee full of people, most of whom are not artists, to make these decisions. There’ll be a decline in the quality of the show. Bob is extremely talented. He’s a great artist. He’s really funny. It’s the difference between a product that’s very good and a product that’s great. And John and Bob themselves have said that it’s not going to be on the cutting edge in a lot of respects. It’s hard for me to imagine REN & STIMPY when it’s not on the cutting edge.”

About Camp’s position as “head” of the new project, Kricfalusi said, “Bob Camp in no way has the same position that I have at Spumco. They’ve taken away the show so that there won’t be any particular person in charge of it. They’re not just going to take it from me and hand it over to someone even more volatile than I am.

“They have not turned the show over to him—that makes it sound like now there’s going to be another person creatively in charge of the show. The show was turned



Celebrating in the pilot “Big House Blues,” before Charlie the dog takes his long walk to “The Big Sleep.”

over to Vanessa. Vanessa is the one taking responsibility, now. Vanessa’s the producer. She’s the boss of the show. She turned it over to herself.”

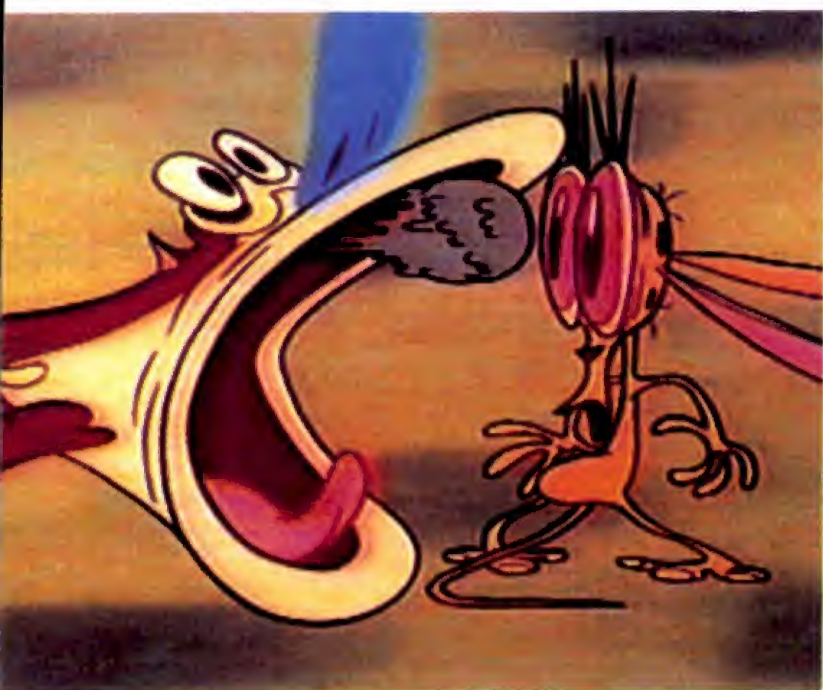
What will Camp’s contribution be, then? “I think it will be even less than what he did on the show while at Spumco,” said Kricfalusi. “Spumco basically protected him from all the bullshit, and allowed him to just do his work, do what he was good at. Now there’s no structure like that. There’s no structure, period, where he is. He’s left totally to fend for himself. I’d hate to be in his position.

“The only thing that they can do is to start from scratch,” said Kricfalusi. “They could produce the shows the way other studios produce them: write scripts—which we don’t do—have somebody storyboard

them, illustrate the script exactly, then have somebody else come in to write the exposure sheets—which is the timing—based on the storyboard, and then ship the stuff overseas. That’s how everybody else does it. But the materials that they have right now are the materials that are tailored to our system. The shows that are in different stages of production—you can’t just take those and plug them into a different system and expect them to work. It’s just going to be a mess. And you especially can’t do it if you don’t know how animation works in the first place, which none of them do. Even Bob, as talented as he is—he’s an absolutely great artist—he’s not an animator. When he finishes his storyboards, they go to animators and animation directors, who magically turn them into a film. And those



**THE BOY WHO CRIED RAT** had Ren and Stimpy pretending to be cat and mouse to con cash and food out of a proto-’50s couple of suburbanites. The set-up results in the scene where Stimpy is forced to eat-up his friend or blow the deal (far left), with a gruesome closeup of the cat’s teeth (left). Nick passed on “Cried Rat II,” just chewing without the pretense.



Gross beginnings: Stimpy barfs up a hairball on Ren in "Big House Blues," the series' award-winning pilot. Nick hired away Bob Camp to write its epitaph.

people work with me."

Spumco animator Eddie Fitzgerald pointed to the achievements of episodes like "Stimpy's Invention" and "Space Madness" to put Kricfalusi's debacle with Nickelodeon in proper perspective. "He wanted to push it even further than those films," said Fitzgerald. "He was sure that there was more to it that he hadn't covered yet. Of course, that takes extra time to do. He didn't know it would take as much time as it did—he was surprised himself—but he was determined to push that through. There was trouble on their end as well, but on his end, he wanted to save the animation industry."

**A**t this point, though, no one knows whether Kricfalusi's quest will take hold in the rest of the industry, or whether such innovation can even travel beyond the circle of Kricfalusi's influence. "I have a lot of anxiety," said Fitzgerald, "cause I'm afraid John will get hit by a meteor, or by a car tomorrow. He's irreplaceable. There's no number two man who can do what John can do."

One thing Kricfalusi is convinced of is that the future of REN & STIMPY is, at best, a dark one. It's an unfortunate situation, doubly so since, by the director's own admission, everyone—from both corporate and artistic walks—originally entered into the venture with the best of intentions. "Vanessa, in the beginning, worked by passion, and admired my passion. But business killed the passion this year. It became too popular. Even though passion made the success of REN & STIMPY, the passion was what was taken out of it this year. When they took it away from us, it was because of the passion, because we were too passionate."

"In their eyes, we never earned the right to our passion—even though it is now going to make them hundreds of millions of dollars. That's the biggest irony of the whole thing." □

# Ren & Stimpy

## INSIDE GAMES

*Former Spumco partner Bob Camp on Nick's in-house Games Productions.*

*By Dan Persons*

Passing the torch in Hollywood is rarely as elegant a process as the metaphor might suggest. The move of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW from independent studio Spumco to Nickelodeon's own, in-house Games Productions could serve as a prime example—braced as the new proprietors might have been for the animosity that greeted them, the response still came as something of a shock. "I think people seem to forget that I was one of the people who helped invent the show," said former Spumco founder and current REN & STIMPY "creative director" Bob Camp, when we managed to track him and background coordinator Bill Wray down at the Nickelodeon offices in New York. "I didn't invent the characters, but I helped invent the show and the style of humor in it, and wrote a whole bunch of the jokes and a bunch of the cartoons. Bill was there and helped create the visual style of the show."

Clearly, a mid-season switch in which an entire animation studio had to be hired, organized and instantly revved up to speed was no small order. How was it orchestrated? "The necessity of it made it happen," said Camp. "We had meetings about how to better do cartoons, how to streamline the process, and basically how to make cartoons without John [Kricfalusi]. The whole [Spumco] process wasn't really an exact science, it was more-or-less that John ran everything and it was all in John's head. No one knew what was going on but John. Things got done based on John's ability to oversee them."

The decentralization of responsibilities at Games (which is actually a catch-all title Nickelodeon uses for its in-house productions—"I think it has something to do with keeping it a non-union show," Camp suggested) is well under way, though Camp denied the rumor that Nick would eventually ease the company out of its layout responsibilities and gradually transfer the artistically critical task to overseas studios. "We did a show over there ["The Big Baby

Scam"], but that happened at Spumco—it was John's decision to send shows overseas because we were so far overbudget and so far behind schedule that there was no way with our limited supply of artists that we could produce these shows."

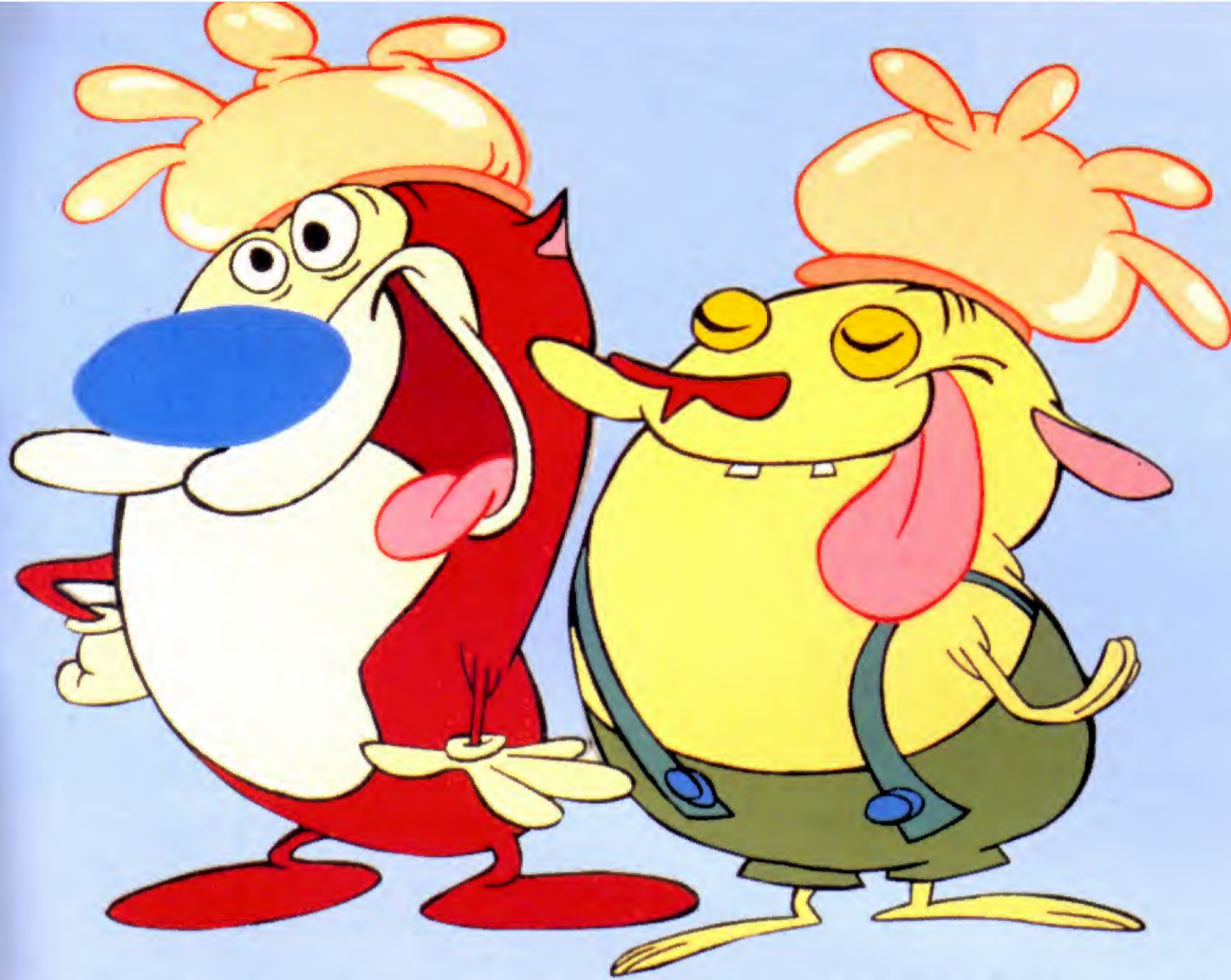
"A certain number of cartoons will probably end up being laid out overseas," added Wray, "simply because we have to meet certain deadlines and we'll end up trying to make the other cartoons as strong as if John were personally laying them out, as he would try to do. It's *not* policy. We will only do it when we have to do it and when we do do it, we'll try to do it the same way Disney does: layout key scenes and designs and send the director with the show. You cannot do animation in any kind of timely way the way that John did it. He *proved* you couldn't do it. There's a product that needs to be expedited. The only way the show can be a profitable venture and continue to be popular is if we can get shows out."

But does this drive towards popularity

Camp (r) and background artist Bill Wray at Nick's offices in New York, still mustering an attitude. Said Camp, "The necessity of it made it happen."







"Sven Hoek," the first second season show Games finished up. Stimpy bonds instantly with Ren's Swedish cousin.

and profitability mean the show will lose the visionary style and edgy humor that were its chief draws? "No," said Camp, "we're still the same assholes we were over at Spumco. We're still doing REN & STIMPY. We're not interested in doing the SMURFS. It's going to be the same show."

"But," said Wray, "we're not John. We're not going to be able to do the same level of tortured psychodrama that he was capable of—he was a brilliant innovator along those lines. We're going to try—as hard as we can—to be as funny and as cutting-edge as we possibly can. No one's told us, 'Now that John's gone, we've gotta do a pap show.'"

But there are signs that the edgy, aggressive humor that gave the show its cult appeal will be missing. Games is actually working to smooth over some of banned episode "Man's Best Friend"'s more prominent edges; in particular, re-shooting the closing sequence to tone down its violence. Said Camp, "It's a great cartoon, right? You liked it? But you're an adult. Do you have kids? Can you imagine showing that to your five-year-old? Think about it. Guys like it, 'cause we grew up watching Larry Fine get the shit beat out of him. But Nickelodeon's the wrong venue for a cartoon like that. You've got to look at it from Nickelodeon's standpoint: they've got a cartoon that cost five hundred thousand dollars—almost half again over budget—and they got no place to show it. I mean, it's a *children's network*."

Other changes are in the works. Voice performer Billy West (who does Stimpy as well as numerous other characters on the show), has been recruited to replace Kricfalusi as the voice of Ren Hoek, though it's not guaranteed that he'll continue in the job

past this season. Similarly, Canadian animation house Carbunkle Cartoons—one of the most important factors in the show's success—is finishing up its work on such upscale episodes as "Visit to Anthony" and "Kilted Yaksmen," but may not return for the promised third season.

The unsettled nature of production has taken its toll on Camp's home life. "As it is, I have to stay up at night. I take work home with me and I sit on my couch with my kid in my lap and draw layouts 'til two or three in the morning many nights, just to get the work done.

"I think John owes me a debt of thanks. He called 'Son of Stimpy' [in an interview in *The Hollywood Reporter*] 'my gift to Nickelodeon.' I'm sorry, I did half that cartoon. I finished it and it's a damn good cartoon. I'll go as far as to say that it's one of the finest cartoons I've ever seen, and that has a lot to do with Games Productions.

"I don't want anybody to get the idea that we're sitting around being mad at John or mad at Spumco or anything. We all worked real hard at that place and we consider ourselves a part of it. I wish we were still doing it there. I wish we were still working with John. And I'm sorry things worked out the way they did. There was nothing I could do about it. Hard as I tried, I could not keep this from happening, and I *did* try.

"There are people out there who are saying I was in cahoots with the whole thing and that I doctored it. I was the surgeon of this whole situation. That did not happen. People may be mad at me, but I had to do what I had to do. I have to keep working—I have my career to consider. If it all happened exactly the same way, I'd make the same decision." □

**"Yessir, there's nothing a man hates more than having his lower lifeforms sit on his non-living possessions!" —George Liquor establishing pecking orders, from "Man's Best Friend"**

### MAN'S BEST FRIEND

★★★

Directed by John Kricfalusi.

George Liquor, American, has decided it's high-time he shared his abundant store of love with a couple of God's lesser creatures. He plucks Ren and Stimpy out of the local pet shop for just such a purpose (they want the gig so badly that they manage, by sheer force of will, to make themselves look like a normal dog and cat for a few fleeting seconds). Unfortunately it isn't until everyone gets home that the two new arrivals discover that George's brand of tough-love doesn't exactly promise days filled with doggie treats and idle hours lazing in the sun. Some great stuff here, including the ultimate fate of a goldfish evicted from his bowl, and scenes of psychological torture so intense that the Russian roulette scene from *THE DEERHUNTER* looks like a commercial for Club Med in comparison.

Nickelodeon rejected this completed cartoon before the second season had even started. They refused to say why, although shots of George passing out "Lawn Cigar" doggie treats and a sequence in which Ren, pushed to the limit, pummels George mercilessly with a bludgeoning oar might have provided ample reason (rumor has it that Games will re-animate the more violent sections, toning them down). However, what also might have sealed the episode's fate is the fact that, while the cartoon is funny as all hell, it's also possibly too close a portrait of a genuine, dysfunctional relationship.



George Liquor tries to force Ren to do his duty on the newspaper in "Man's Best Friend," the show Nickelodeon has still refused to air at presstime.

Noted Spumco layout artist Eddie Fitzgerald, "A friend of mine said, 'You know, really it's a film about mind games.' A lot of times parents subconsciously provoke a kid into yelling and then they'll get mad at him when he yells. And they wonder why the kids leave home after high school and they never see them again. People play subconscious games like that, and this friend of mine was saying that that's what he thought the whole film was about. Maybe. For me, it was just a funny film."

Orphaned, at least temporarily, from its rightful spot on the air, the cartoon has been making the underground circuit within the industry and gathering some high-powered fans in its travels. "It was a little wilder than the cartoons from the first season," said Matt Groening, creator and executive producer of *THE SIMPSONS*, "but if I ran the zoo, I would have to broadcast it. My suggestion to Nickelodeon is either to show it theatrically or get it out on home video before the sleazeballs bootleg it." □

# MANT

## Making Joe Dante's '50s-style monster movie-within-a-movie.

By *Steve Biodrowski*

MANT, the film-within-a-film being premiered by Lawrence Woolsey (John Goodman) in MATINEE, was obviously intended by director Joe Dante and company as a spoof of monster movies from the '50s, but there was never any intention of trying to wring laughs from cheesy special effects. "We wanted it to look like a good '50s movie," explained Mant designer, Jim McPherson. "In AMAZON WOMEN ON THE MOON, they showed wires holding up spaceships—that's funny when you see it in a real movie but not in a spoof. When I went into the first meeting, I brought along THEM and THE FLY, but Joe didn't want to watch them. He said, 'I've seen them fifty times!' He wanted something different."

In a recreation of a typical "atomic fear movie," as Dante called it, MANT has radiation turning a hapless human victim first into a half-insect mutation and later into a giant, rampaging ant. Because of time constraints, McPherson handed some sculpting chores to Bruce Spaulding Fuller, while mechanics were handled by Jurgen Heimann. Mark McCracken wore the Mant head, which is first revealed from beneath a cloth, *a la* THE FLY, the influence of which can be seen most clearly in the Mant's segmented eyes.

Recalled McPherson, "Midway through the building peri-

od, Joe called and said, 'I'm concerned his head is going to be really big under the cloth. Can't you make a way for his antennae to go down?' Jurgen had to spring load them. Then we put a weighted cloth over them, but it kept snapping off. Finally, I told Mark McCracken, 'I know you're trying to play this sad, but every time you tilt your head down, the antennae snap off the cloth, so you're going to have to hold your head up straight until the cloth is removed; then you can act sad.'

"Jurgen did a great job with the mechanics, which would be the biggest thing we did that is non-period," McPherson continued. "We did it so that we could shoot it easily. We have to assume this is pretty good wire work, or somehow somebody got this thing to work. Movies like CURSE OF THE DEMON actually do have cable-controlled faces. But we used modern motors."

McPherson's design sketch of the fully mutated Mant, built as a rod puppet.



Mark McCracken as the "Mant," makeup and effects designed by Jim McPherson.

The "giant" ant was actually a three-foot miniature, which utilized three different abdomens, depending on whether the puppeteer's hand had to enter from behind, top, or bottom in order to avoid being seen by the camera. "Right at the beginning, there was a lot of concern about what we could get with this puppet," said McPherson. "I quickly tried to figure out the exact shots we could have, where to put people and keep them out of frame. [Effects d.p.] Bill Neal wanted the composition absolutely as good as we could get it. Some of the shots we did 20 takes and in a few of them you wouldn't see the puppeteer. I gave him a safe shot, and he would say, 'I'd like it to be more interesting.' So you always end up pushing the limit."

The twelfth-scale miniature effects were supervised by Dennis Michelson. "I rented some buildings, set it up in a warehouse in Culver City, and

shot the three-foot ant climbing up and down and carrying cars around," explained Michelson. "The puppet was pretty sophisticated. Jim McPherson and his crew built something that, I would say, was almost better than what it needed to be for that time period. Those guys can't really tone down their quality. It was beautiful. If you were making a giant ant picture today, that's what you would use."

In order to save money, the giant ant's legs were moved simply by off-screen hands. "Having all of this rigged would have cost a lot," said McPherson. "I planned it so that the elbow and wrist of the puppeteer would be the two main points of movement, so you could get most of the performance with just an arm. We also used a pole-arm rig from GREMLINS II that Rick Baker suggested—it has a kind of steering wheel at the end which you can turn to rotate the head. A lot of it was really simple. For instance, we cut up brushes and broom straws for the little bristly hairs, because that was something we could do ourselves."

Overall, McPherson enjoyed the opportunity to build an old-fashioned monster inspired by everything from DEADLY MANTIS to ATTACK OF THE CRAB MONSTERS and he believes his director enjoyed the opportunity as well. Quipped McPherson, "I know Joe wanted to finish the whole movie." □

# REVIEWS

## The joys of the horror movie, vintage 1962, in a 1993 bottle

### MATINEE

A Universal Pictures release of a Renfield production. 1/93, 99 mins. In Dolby and color. Director, Joe Dante. Producer, Michael Finnell. Director of Photography, John Hora. Editor, Marshall Harvey. Production designer, Steven Legler. Visual effects supervisor, Dennis Michelson. Mant/Ant design, James McPherson. Costume designer, Isis Mussenden. Music, Jerry Goldsmith. Sound, Howard Warren. Screenplay by Charlie Haas, from a story by Jerico Haas.

Lawrence Woolsey	John Goodman
Ruth Corday/Carol	Cathy Moriarty
Gene Loomis	Simon Fenton
Stan	Omri Katz
Sandra	Lisa Jakub
Sherry	Kellie Martin
Dennis Loomis	Jesse Lee
Anne Loomis	Lucinda Jenney
Harvey Starkweather	James Villemaire
Spector	Jesse White

by Thomas Doherty

Horrormeister William Castle was the king of teenpic exploitation in the late '50s and early '60s, an eccentric impresario whose wild brand of showmanship, for sheer lunatic inventiveness, was unsurpassed. At a time when television had fragmented Hollywood's once devoted and monolithic public, when teens and subteens were the apparent salvation for theatrical motion pictures, Castle brought the atmosphere of the carnival sideshow—or freakshow—to the local bijou. What his films lacked in budget and brains, they made up for in bonehead gimmickry.

For a certain generation of Kennedy-era loners—like Joe Dante, the director cheerfully admits—such gems in the rough as *THE TINGLER* (the first LSD movie), *THIRTEEN GHOSTS* (filmed in "Illusion-O"), and *MR. SARDONICUS* (where 20 years before *CLUE* viewers got to vote on their preferred ending) helped make early adolescence tolerable. Castle was the Barnum of the last great age of old-fashioned ad-pub ballyhoo, before the onset of today's deadly earnest and deadly predictable publicity machines.

Dante bows to the venerable spirit of the haunted Castle and the glory days of hyperbolic hucksterism in *MATINEE*, a thoroughly hilarious and surprisingly reflective comedy drama. Dante, who cut his teeth on *PIRANHA* (1978) for Roger Corman's New World before moving upscale (in budget if not in sensibility) with *GREMLINS*, *INNERSPACE* and



Cathy Moriarty and the long-suffering MANT, a man fused with an ant by an errant dental X-ray machine, Dante's clever film-within-a-film evocation of '50s B-movie horror.

the underrated *THE 'BURBS*, has always possessed a Castlesque flare for in-theatre trickery. In Dante's *GREMLINS II*, the little beasties apparently take over the theatre's projection booth, pull the film out of frame and make hand puppets on the screen—a disruption that Dante, clever scoundrel, adapted for the home video version to mimic a disrupted TV signal. So Castle's legacy is in suitably bent hands.

Set in Key West, Florida, during the white-knuckle days of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, *MATINEE* is a double-edged double bill that flashes between the make-believe horror of a movie matinee and the all-too-real horror show taking place outside the theatre walls, a mere 90 miles from Castro and a whole lot closer, in truth, to apocalypse now. It's kind of a *DR. STRANGE-LOVE* with the motion picture industry taking the place of the military industrial complex. The hero is 15-year-old Navy brat Gene Loomis (Simon Fenton) who, with his little brother in tow, takes refuge in the sort of low-budget, lowbrow monster movies that scare youngsters not stiff but safely. No matinee outing is more eagerly anticipated than the latest release from producer Lawrence Woolsey (John Goodman), a searing epic of entomological mutation call *MANT*—"half man, half

ant, all terror," filmed in "vivid Atomo-Vision and spine-tingling Rumble Rama." This, Gene has got to see. And no wonder—the trailer from *MANT* that opens *MATINEE* is a brilliant tease, xeroxing with total fidelity the wild crawls, screaming taglines and breathless voiceovers of the coming attractions for bottom of the bill, grade-B science fiction.

Dante juggles three, not two levels of film and historical reality: the film-within-the-film (*MANT*), the real Cuban Missile Crisis and the movie *MATINEE*. Somehow, he manages to keep all three in the air at the same time, tossing off moments of rollicking fantasy against scenes of chilling realism. Gene has a nightmare vision of nuclear armageddon worthy of Sarah Connor, but the sight of missile launchers being positioned on the Florida coastline is a truly Dantesque atomo-vision. The tension of those ten days in October is well rendered via authentic archival footage from television news bulletins, "duck and cover" air raid drills, conalrad radio and vault-sized fallout shelters.

Throughout—and this is one of the film's real pleasures—Dante and screenwriter Charlie Haas (*GREMLINS*) maintain sharp eyes and ears for the nuances of Camelot-coated teen culture, whether it's Gene Pitney's

1962 hit "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" popping up on a 45rpm turntable or the faithfully rendered matinee performance of *MANT*, a combination of *THE FLY* and *THE WASP WOMAN*. The special effects (that's the wrong phrase) are as cheesy as the acting. It's hard to do bad this good.

Corman veteran and Dante regular Dick Miller and *PIRANHA* screenwriter and MacArthur Fellow John Sayles play a pair of con men who, disguised as outraged citizens protesting the exhibition of *MANT*, are really Woolsey's partners in exploitation. Cathy Moriarty works triple shifts as leading lady Ruth Corday, the screaming spouse of Mant and the not-really-hardbitten girlfriend of Woolsey. For the premiere she dresses in a nurse's outfit while the kids sign life insurance policies against death from fright.

Dante injects a bit of puppy love and pubescent sex anxiety into the climactic matinee screening. Gene's friend Stan (Omri Katz) gets the luscious and worldly-wise Sherry (Kellie Martin), a Patty Duke look-alike who unfortunately comes with an older and very jealous boyfriend, an ex-con named Harvey Starkweather (James Villemaire) with no talent for beat poetry. Gene approaches first base with Sandra (Lisa Jakub), a sort of Joan Baez in a training bra. She has the film's one false scene, a histrionic ban-the-bomb lecture delivered as she is dragged away to the school principal for refusing to participate in a duck and cover drill. Dante and Haas didn't have to telegraph the message, the pathetic sight of the kids hunched over by their lockers in the school corridors says it all.

Happily, sex and politics take a backseat to the front and center joys of the horror movie, a 1962 vintage in a 1993 bottle. A tribute to the Castle spirit worthy of the original, it's a minor masterpiece of tone, wit and period restoration and a brilliant nuclear age comedy that mushrooms with teenpic trivia. □

## BOXOFFICE SURVEY: 1992 RECAP

An analysis of the top-grossing films, as reported in *Variety's* "Weekend Boxoffice Report," reveals that horror, fantasy and science fiction films accounted for 31.6% of all film earnings in 1992, a 5% decrease from the genre's 1991 market share. Genre films accounted for 22.5% of all films released last year, slightly higher than 1991.

Top grossing genre films in the *Variety* totals are listed at right. Titles are indicated as horror (h), fantasy (f) and science fiction (sf), followed by number of weeks in 1992 each title made the *Variety* listing.

This year's biggest money maker was the fantasy hit **BATMAN 2**, earning over \$162 million. Horror was the only category to improve this year, thanks to the controversial **BASIC INSTINCT**, which earned \$117 million, followed by **THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE** at \$87 million.

Of the 320 titles that comprised the listings, there were 29 fantasy films (33 last year), accounting for 9.8% of all films and 11.7% of receipts, 29 horror films (21 last year), 9% of all films and 13.5% of receipts and 14 horror films (17 last year), 4.4% of all films and 6.5% of receipts.

In breakdown by distributor (below), Buena Vista, (**THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE**), took the largest portion of the genre market, earning over \$391 million, followed by Warner Bros (**BATMAN 2**), knocking last year's top earner TriStar (**BASIC INSTINCT**) down two notches.

### TOP TEN MONEY MAKERS

<b>BATMAN 2</b> (Wb, f, 17)	\$162,514,477
<b>BASIC INSTINCT</b> (Tst, h, 29)	\$117,233,895
<b>THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE</b> (Bv, h, 26)	\$ 87,553,000
<b>BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA</b> (Col, h, 7)	\$ 81,001,426
<b>BEAUTY &amp; THE BEAST</b> (Bv, f, 7)	\$ 71,081,352
<b>HONEY, I BLEW UP THE KIDS</b> (Bv, sf, 24)	\$ 58,553,624
<b>DEATH BECOMES HER</b> (U, h, 18)	\$ 58,422,650
<b>ALIEN 3</b> (Fox, sf, 11)	\$ 54,927,174
<b>HOOK</b> (Tst, f, 21)	\$ 48,386,386
<b>SINGLE WHITE FEMALE</b> (Col, h, 20)	\$ 47,848,016

### OTHER TOP EARNERS

<b>ENCINO MAN</b> (Bv, sf, 18)	\$ 40,057,130
<b>UNIVERSAL SOLDIER</b> (Tst, sf, 13)	\$ 36,193,240
<b>LAWNMOWER MAN</b> (Ni, sf, 16)	\$ 32,070,997
<b>SLEEPWALKERS</b> (Col, h, 11)	\$ 29,068,075
<b>CANDYMAN</b> (Tst, h, 11)	\$ 24,815,280
<b>RAISING CAIN</b> (U, h, 11)	\$ 21,171,695
<b>FERN GULLY</b> (Fox, f, 10)	\$ 21,111,825
<b>THE ADDAMS FAMILY</b> (Par, h, 17)	\$ 19,516,878
<b>PRELUDE TO A KISS</b> (Fox, f, 8)	\$ 19,396,251
<b>STAR TREK VI</b> (Par, sf, 17)	\$ 18,877,909
<b>PINOCCHIO</b> (Bv, f, 11)	\$ 18,603,237
<b>FOREVER YOUNG</b> (Wb, f, 2)	\$ 18,288,480
<b>THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL</b> (Bv, f, 3)	\$ 17,477,344
<b>PET SEMATARY 2</b> (Par, h, 13)	\$ 17,045,383
<b>FREEJACK</b> (Wb, sf, 10)	\$ 17,033,142
<b>MEMOIRS OF AN INVISIBLE MAN</b> (Wb, sf, 15)	\$ 14,358,033
<b>BUFFY, THE VAMPIRE SLAYER</b> (VOX, h, 5)	\$ 14,231,669
<b>COOL WORLD</b> (Par, f, 5)	\$ 14,110,589
<b>ADVENTURES OF THE GREAT MOUSE DETECTIVE</b> (Bv, f, 11)	\$ 13,021,112
<b>ROCK-A-DOODLE</b> (Gol, f, 15)	\$ 11,657,385
<b>TOYS</b> (Fox, f, 2)	\$ 11,631,487
<b>JENNIFER 8</b> (Par, h, 6)	\$ 11,281,492
<b>STAY TUNED</b> (Wb, f, 13)	\$ 10,170,891
<b>WHISPERS IN THE DARK</b> (Par, h, 5)	\$ 10,319,310
<b>BEBE'S KIDS</b> (Par, f, 6)	\$ 8,284,881
<b>DR. GIGGLES</b> (U, h, 8)	\$ 8,205,290
<b>SPLIT SECOND</b> (Is, sf, 9)	\$ 5,426,781
<b>INNOCENT BLOOD</b> (Bv, h, 9)	\$ 4,877,567
<b>RADIO FLYER</b> (Col, f, 4)	\$ 4,279,178
<b>TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME</b> (Ni, h, 6)	\$ 4,160,851
<b>AN AMERICAN TAIL: FIEVEL GOES WEST</b> (U, f, 6)	\$ 3,820,439
<b>BLADE RUNNER</b> (Wb, sf, 11)	\$ 3,725,534
<b>YEAR OF THE COMET</b> (Col, f, 3)	\$ 2,689,680
<b>SHADOWS &amp; FOG</b> (O, h, 3)	\$ 2,533,621
<b>NAKED LUNCH</b> (Fox, h, 8)	\$ 2,153,325
<b>GATE II</b> (Tri, h, 6)	\$ 2,032,973
<b>MOM &amp; DAD SAVE THE WORLD</b> (Wb, sf, 2)	\$ 2,018,274
<b>DELICATESSEN</b> (Mx, sf, 23)	\$ 1,648,714
<b>THE FISHER KING</b> (Tst, f, 7)	\$ 1,176,095
<b>DEAD AGAIN</b> (Par, h, 4)	\$ 1,200,146
<b>FREDDIE AS F.R.O.7</b> (Mmx, f, 2)	\$ 1,200,000
<b>LITTLE NEMO</b> (Hd, f, 3)	\$ 1,065,000

### GENRE FILM REVENUE BY DISTRIBUTOR

Distributor	% of Films	Earnings	% of Total
Buena Vista	10	\$391,860,365	29.3
Warner Bros	8	\$229,380,433	17.2
TriStar	6	\$227,937,692	17.1
Columbia	5	\$164,886,375	12.3
Fox	5	\$123,456,731	9.3
Paramount	10	\$101,103,194	7.6
New Line	3	\$ 36,246,149	2.7
Universal	5	\$ 20,267,651	1.6
Dimension	1	\$ 12,525,537	.9
Goldwyn	1	\$ 11,657,385	.9
Interstar	1	\$ 5,426,781	.4
Miramax	6	\$ 4,698,610	.3
Orion	1	\$ 2,533,621	.2
Triumph	1	\$ 2,032,973	.2
All Others	9	\$ 1,622,438	.1

● Indicates a film originally released before 1992

### FILM RATINGS

- Must See
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Poor

### CONFESSIONS OF A SERIAL KILLER

Directed by Mark Blair. New Horizons Video. 8/92, 88 mins. With: Robert A. Burns, Dennis Hill, Berkley Garrett.

Classic exploitation package: the video box is a steal from **SILENCE OF THE LAMBS**, the title evokes **HENRY: PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER**; the film itself (shot in Texas at least three years ago) is a *very* slightly altered version of the Henry Lee Lucas serial murder story. The ironic thing about all this is that the film is not half bad. Virtually every performance feels just right from Robert A. Burns (as the shockingly amoral but mild-mannered sociopath) to Berkley Garrett (as the canny Texas lawman to whom Burns relates his bloody career). Burns is the art director of Tobe Hoppers's **TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE**, making his acting debut. Surprisingly unexploitative—especially since the film basically consists of a series of recreated murders—the film also eschews overt moralizing, philosophizing and psychological claptrap. Shot in a flat, **AMERICA'S MOST WANTED**-documentary style, though the film is not boring, it's not exactly entertaining. Gorehounds will be disappointed at the fairly tame nature of the crimes, while others may be to embarrassed to rent it.

● David Wilt

### MANIAC COP 3: BADGE OF SILENCE

Directed by William Lustig & Joel Soisson. HBO. 12/92, 84 mins. With: Robert Davi, Caitlin Dulany, Gretchen Becker, Paul Gleason.

Perhaps the inability of his film **THE AMBULANCE** to find a distributor has fixated screenwriter Larry Cohen on hospitals. At any rate, a large portion of this excruciatingly dull sequel is set in one-of-these-fantasy-movie-hospitals which are always

deserted and have secret passages to Santeria temples. Robert Z'Dar once again plays the title role, but is almost always off screen or photographed so his face is in darkness, making evaluation of his KNB makeup impossible. Robert Forster has a four-minute, un-billed cameo 50 minutes into the film, along with the credited Paul Gleason. Neither is worth the wait. Like the previous films, the ending, once again, boasts a prolonged fire stunt, longer but less impressive than **MANIAC COP 2**, due to several cuts in the extended sequence. ○ Judith Harris

### NECROMANCER

Directed by Dusty Nelson. Written by Bill Naud. Cinemax. 1/93, 87 mins. With: Elizabeth Cayton, Russ Tamblyn.

On the shelf since 1988, without even a video release, this debuted on Cinemax. Elizabeth Cayton is a college coed who is raped by some classmates and answers an ad in the paper offering revenge. The advertiser turns out to be a witch who invokes a demon who masquerades as Cayton before killing anyone she's mad at and making them vanish. Characters are all sleazes or airheads, and the repetitive plot grinds out slowly before an unsatisfying ending. Makeup effects are subpar and blessedly few. Russ Tamblyn adds a professional air to the proceedings, but appears to have improvised his own dialogue.

○ Judith Harris

### SCANNERS III: THE TAKEOVER

Directed by Christian Duguay. Cinemax. 12/92, 100 mins. With: Liliana Komorowska, Valerie Valois, Daniel Pilon, Collin Fox.

Yet another good scanner versus a bunch-o'-bad scanners with some kickboxing thrown in. Once again, as in the original film, the good and bad scanners are siblings, but this time it's the side effects of a drug that turns scanner Liliana Komorowska into a baddie. The drug, EPH-3, worn as a behind-the-ear patch, first causes her to kill her adopted Dad, take over a TV network, explode the heads of a bunch of football players on live TV and, fi-

Art director-turned-actor Bob Burns (l) in **CONFESSIONS OF A SERIAL KILLER**, with Sydney Brammer as Molly and Dennis Hill as Moon, true-to-life horror.



# DRACULA



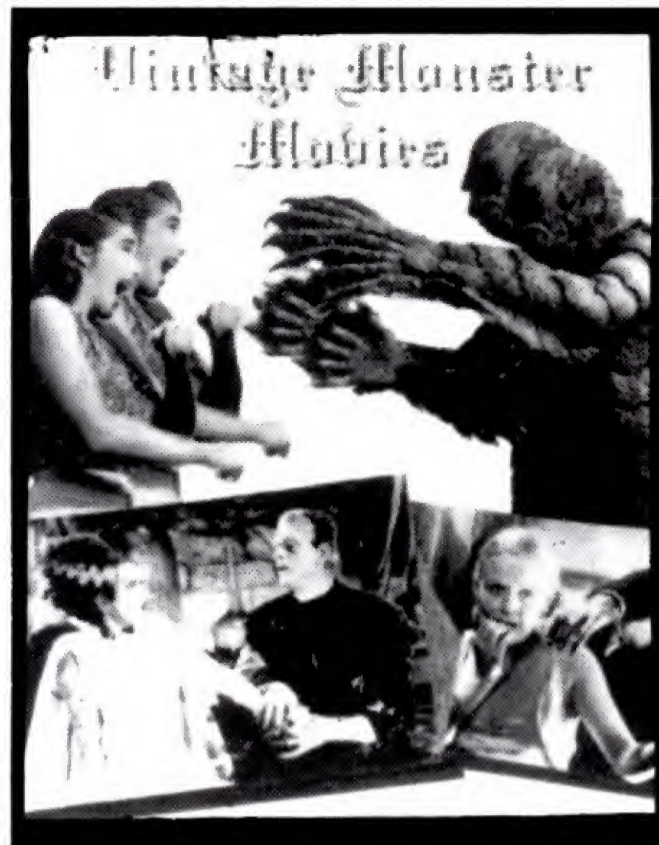
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nally, wear her corset on top of her clothes. This is one of those idiot plots (cobbled together by three writers) where all anyone needs to do is knock the patch off the bad scanners (most of whom are dressed like the Blues Brothers in dark suits and shades) and everything will be okay, but 95 painful minutes chug by before the dull hero thinks of it. Yet another waste-o'-time Canadian film with merely adequate makeup effects by Mike Maddi.

o Judith Harris

### SORORITY HOUSE MASSACRE II

Directed by Jim Wynorski. New Horizons Video. 9/92, 76 mins. With: Robyn Harris, Melissa Moore, "Orville Ketchum."

This short and narratively sloppy exploitation film nonetheless delivers the goods in the "babes and bodies" department. Five pneumatic sorority girls move into a house which was the scene of a previous mass murder. An ill-advised session with a Ouija board resurrects the deceased perpetrator, and a new body count begins. Director Jim Wynorski makes sure that the five young women are showcased in lingerie or less for at least three-fourths of the film's running time, and tosses in two topless dance performances as well. The film has a witty sense of humor, but some sequences seem out of order and others hardly fit the rest of the film at all. This hardly qualifies as a cult spoof of the genre, but it is short, not too brutal and holds one's attention. Extra credit for a line buried in the end credits: "No Girls Were Actu-

ally Hurt or Mistreated During the Production of this Film."

o David Wilt

### WINTERBEAST

Directed by Christopher Thies. Tempe Video. 11/92, 77 mins. With: Tim R. Morgan, Mike Magri, Charles Majka.

Beware! The video box makes this film look reasonably professional and competent. Wrong! It is a technically inept, incomprehensible, ludicrous amateur-level product, one of the worst to get a commercial release in years. Plot has something to do with a gateway to Hell and Indian demons in the New Hampshire Mountains, and features killer totem poles, Bigfoot, a giant chicken, a dragon and a mummy. However, these are presented in a narrative devoid of the slightest continuity. Every technical aspect is poor: the photography is grainy, poorly lit, and many exterior shots look like footage from a '60s home movie. Interior scenes all seem to take place on sets no more than six feet wide. The sound is often out-of-sync, hollow, or barely audible. Edits are abrupt and dialogue is frequently dropped on the cut. While the stop-motion animation of the monsters is fair, the monsters are poorly designed and there is no interaction with the live footage. Low-budget filmmakers have to labor under a host of handicaps, but there is no excuse for a botched mess like this getting commercial exposure. This could serve as a bad example for other filmmakers, but it is otherwise a total waste of time with no entertainment value whatsoever. o David Wilt

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# LETTERS

## DEEP SPACE NINE'S RUNABOUT

Even the mildest of STAR TREK; DEEP SPACE NINE enthusiasts would be able to tell "resident Star Trek expert Mark A. Altman" that the ship he identifies as a runabout [23:6:34] is in fact an exploration ship (actually the *U.S.S. Grissom* from STAR TREK III). The same comment applies to the ship illustrated on the cover.

Jim James  
Orlando, FL 32812

[The editor, not Altman, made the misidentification, writing captions before the show had aired. One cover concept, thankfully rejected, featured the station upside down, because the behind-the-scenes effects photos we used for reference showed it being filmed that way. We never did get any shots of the Runabout.]

## RODDENBERRY'S PRODIGAL CHILDREN

After viewing both TIME TRAX [23:5:44] and SPACE RANGERS [23:6:48], I would recommend to producers Harve Bennett and Herbert J. Wright that they get on the phone to Paramount and beg for their old STAR TREK jobs back. It is obvious to all that neither man learned anything from their association with Gene Roddenberry or Rick Berman. TIME TRAX is not only boring, but incredibly sexist. A time traveler from the future is able to convince a female federal agent to risk her job and career

prospects to take a mad criminal to court—and not give her anything to go on but his "sincere blue eyes." From Dale Midkiff's totally wooden performance to Peter Donat's over-the-top hamming (all he needs is a moustache to twirl), this show is a loser.

SPACE RANGERS is designed to utilize the clichés of the past, but doesn't utilize them wisely. We have a team that is not only irritating to their superiors, but to the audience as well. If any of them were blown away (especially the engineer called "Doc"), who would miss them? They whine, they moan, they complain. The viewer is increasingly tempted to blast the television in the hopes of doing damage to the show, not just the monitor. The plots are straight from the '60s, the characters from the '40s, and the intelligence level from Saturday morning.

If I had any respect for Bennett and Wright, I don't any longer. The idea is to improve on Gene Roddenberry's ideas, not take a *Large* step backwards.

Ron Murillo  
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

## DRACULA PAN

Your magazine's evaluation of the latest version of DRACULA [23:6:59] was a major sop. It was a film very long on style, short on substance.

Many things about the Coppola/Hart rendition of the story can be forgiven. Characterizing Stoker's innocent and caring Lucy as a

spoiled, vacuous tramp can be excused as well as the dismal miscasting of baby-faced Gary Oldman in the title role. The laughable pudgy wolf attacking Lucy in the cemetery can be forgiven, so can Winona Ryder's pathetic acting and Anthony Hopkins camping one-liners.

What can't be forgiven is the thorough debasement of Stoker's concept. There have been numerous characterizations, even on broadcast TV, that capture the nature of Dracula more accurately and fervently; (Richard Lynch's Anton Voitek in VAMPIRE, Barry Atwater's Janos Skorzeny in NIGHTSTALKER). Hammer films' HORROR OF DRACULA was a much truer interpretation of the Stoker novel, even with its omissions and alterations in the relationships of characters.

Hart and Coppola have taken this wonderful story of terror and evil and corrupted it to the level of teeny-bopper soap opera in a transparent attempt to draw that very same female teenage audience; seemingly with great success and to the detriment of the genre.

This DRACULA couldn't instill fear in a rabbit.

Bruce Giacoppo  
Winter Garden, FL 34787

## BRAINDEAD: WHO'S TO BLAME?

After reading the piece on BRAINDEAD by Alan Jones [23:6:50] I felt I just had to write

and join the ranks of miscredited/uncredited effects chaps.

Over eight months of hard work and long hours went into the project due to its limited time schedule, budget and the sheer amount of work to complete, so it seems only fair to give credit where credit is due. As the article is written it credits Bob McCarron with the entire effects list.

Sydney-based McCarron designed all of the principal zombie characters as well as other prosthetics in the film. He supervised on-set for the first week or so and then passed the work on to Marjory Hamlin for the duration.

On the makeup effects front, Richard Taylor headed a nine-man crew, all making various puppets, suits, body pieces and countless gags. We worked in conjunction with a three-man modelmaking crew who made the various special props like the lawnmower, blender and embalming machine. Taylor's crew consisted of Tania Rodger-admin', Allan Burne, Clifford Highes, Alex Kennedy, Christian Rivers (he also storyboarded) Dominic Taylor, Bill Thompson, Grant Wallis and myself. The modelmaking crew was made up of Titch Rowney, Simon Jones and Peter Frahm. Ramon Aguilar was responsible for puppeteering.

These simple facts (a crew list?) could have been checked before going to press.

Stuart Conran  
Essex, England

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## CORRECTIONS

In our cover story on DEEP SPACE NINE, the article "Scripting the Adventures" failed to accurately state the correct titles of Peter Allan Fields and Ira Steven Behr, who are co-producer and supervising producer, respectively. Fields previously served as executive script consultant on the fifth season of STAR TREK THE NEXT GENERATION. Several quotes were also abridged in the interest of space. The correct spelling of conceptual artist Richard Delgado is Ricardo Delgado.

In our story on TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III, Golden Harvest producer Tom Gray had his name misspelled "Grey."

We regret the errors.

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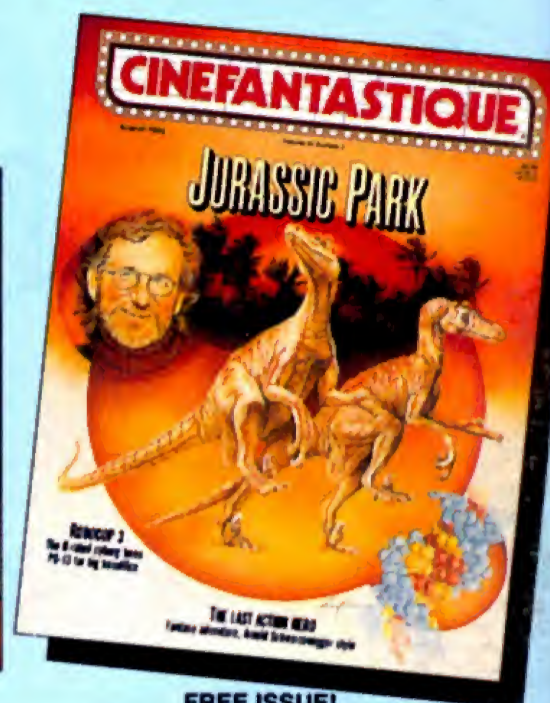
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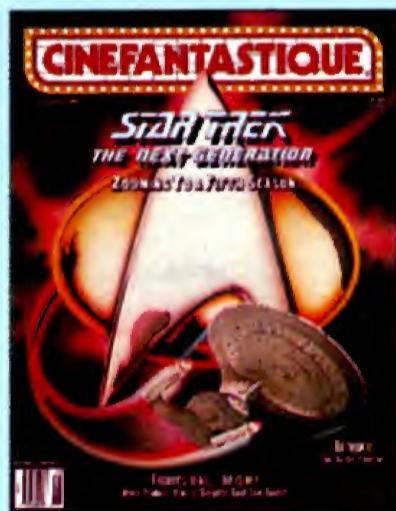
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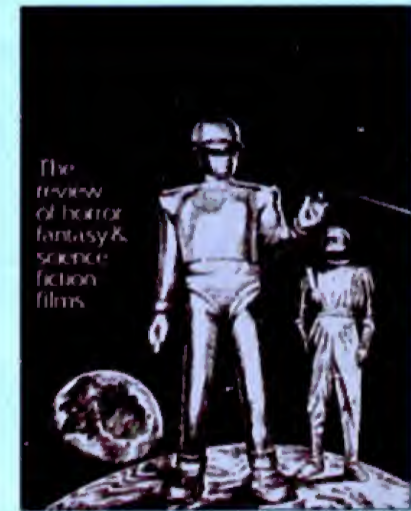
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